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John Williams

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Also in your
Christmas issue!

Daniel Hyde

We meet King's College, Cambridge's new conductor

Advent calendar

24 musical ways to count down to Christmas Day

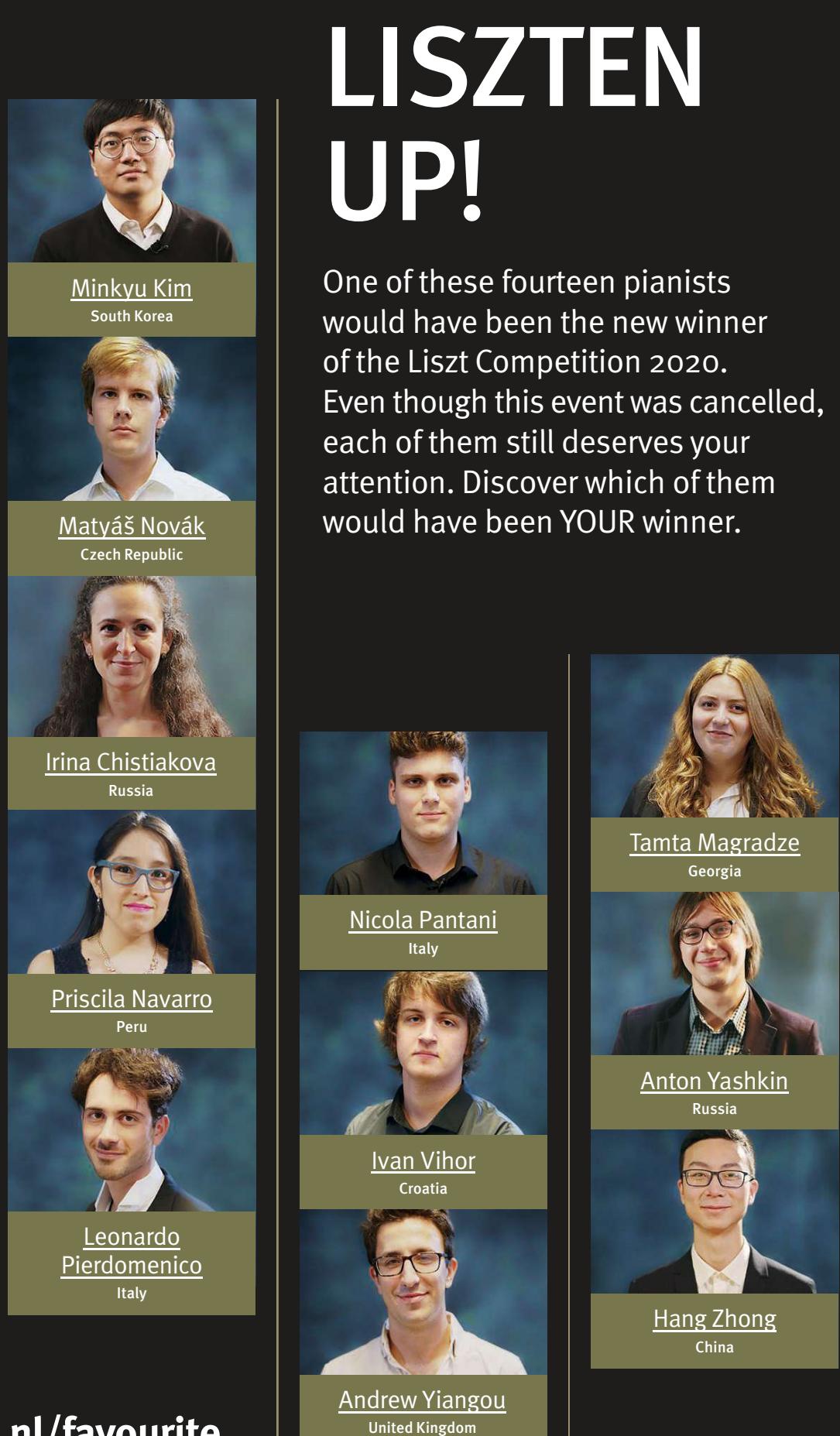
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The chamber music festival deep in the Arctic Circle

100 reviews by the world's finest critics
CDs, DVDs & books – see p66

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Michael Beek

BBC Music's reviews editor

'It's not every day that you pick up the phone to find one of your heroes on the other end of the line. Talking to John Williams about a career I've followed since I was 13 was both a thrill and an honour.' **Page 26**



Freya Waley-Cohen

Composer

'I've written a joyful, earthy carol for you which I hope will bring you some warmth and light as you bring your voices together this Christmas! Writing it felt like sending out a little wish.' **Page 36**



Christopher Cook

Writer and broadcaster

'A chance purchase of a 78 recording of the great tenor aria from *Le postillon de Lonjumeau* kindled my interest in Adolphe Adam, who is one of the least appreciated of French Romantic composers.' **Page 58**

Welcome



As Richard Morrison says on p25, we still don't know what sort of Christmas we're in for. I normally measure out my Advent in choir concerts and the rush to learn some new festive organ music. This year, I'm going to try and still do the latter, despite not having a congregation to hang on my

every note (I wish!). In the spirit of carrying on as normal as possible, we went ahead and commissioned a brand new carol for you to sing. If you're unable to get together for a rehearsal with your choir, you could still spend a few happy hours perusing it at home, and maybe even sneak a performance in before Epiphany. Freya Waley-Cohen's beautiful 'A candle sings of simple things' will, we hope, provide some much-needed light.

Perhaps you're not the singing type – in which case, turn to p40 for our musical Advent calendar, full of activities ranging from cooking Rossini's favourite dish to matching a musical masterpiece to a recommended tipple. On a less frivolous note, on 3 December do stream the carol service from the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in support of Shelter, a charity for the homeless.

2020 has been a strange year – and in March we didn't think we'd be writing this magazine from homes come December. But here we are, and from our corners of the south west of England, we'd all like to wish you a very merry Christmas, whatever you're able to get up to.

Oliver Condy *Editor*

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very latest from the music world

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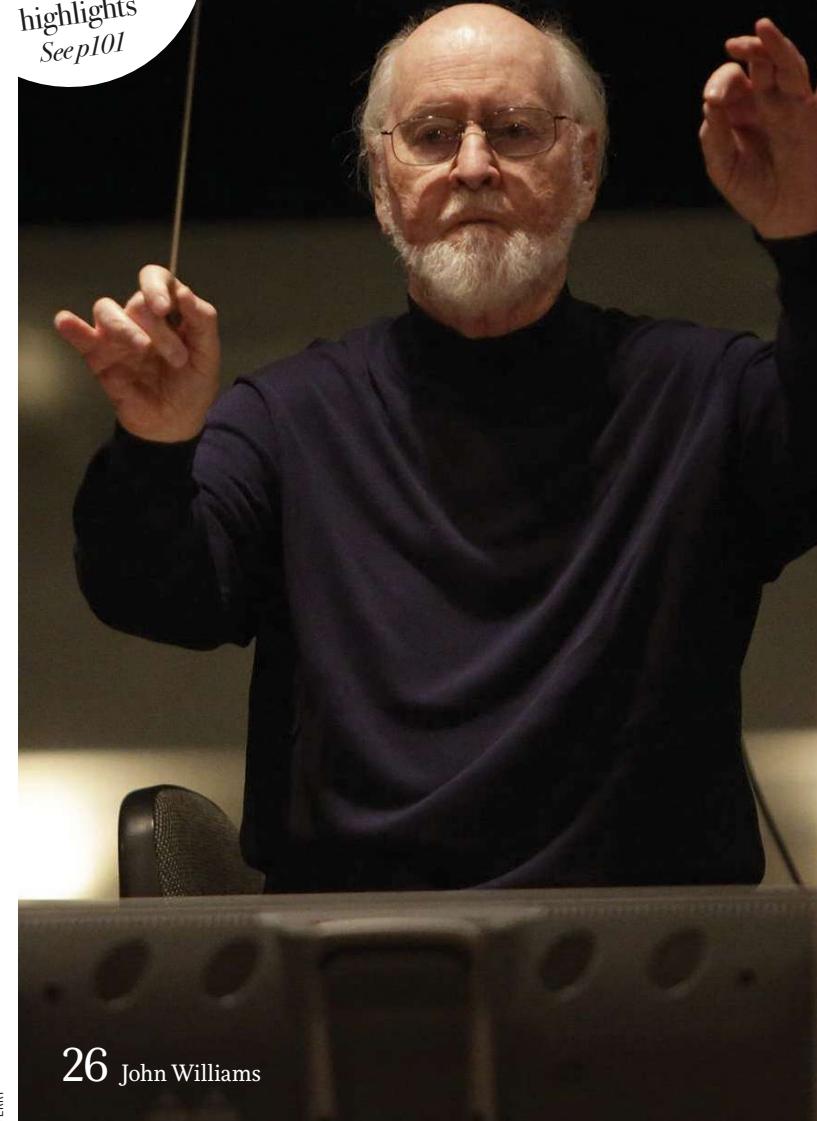
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26 John Williams

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Plus our choices of a musical guest – living or departed – for Christmas dinner

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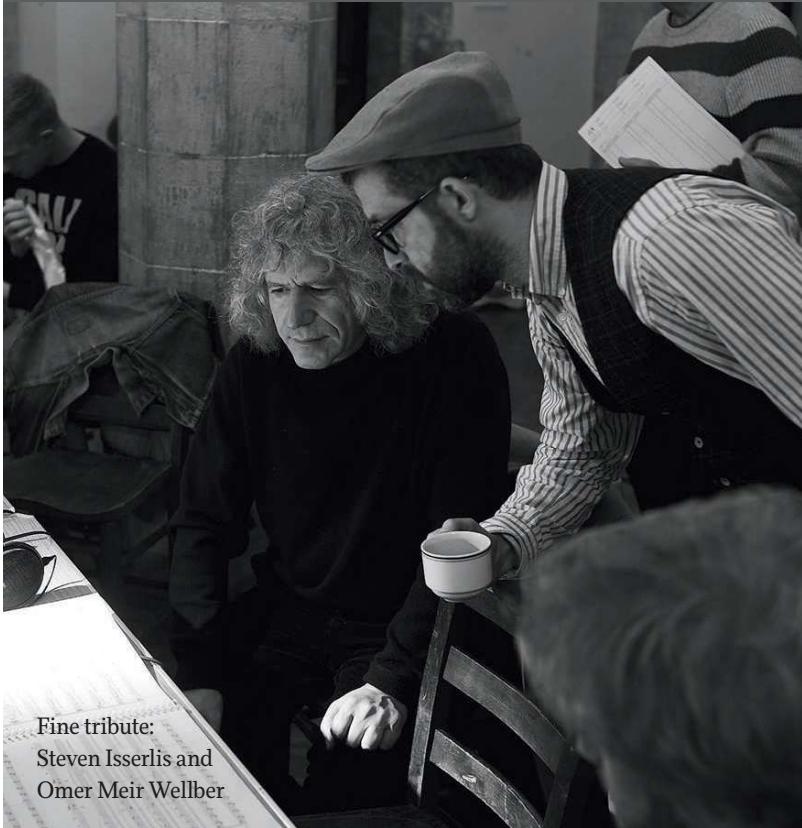
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Chi-chi Nwanoku, Adam Barker

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Christmas reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings, DVDs and books



Fine tribute:
Steven Isserlis and
Omer Meir Wellber

66 Recording of the Month

Tavener

No longer mourn for me

'These are among John Tavener's most powerful works, [and] they are magnificently performed'

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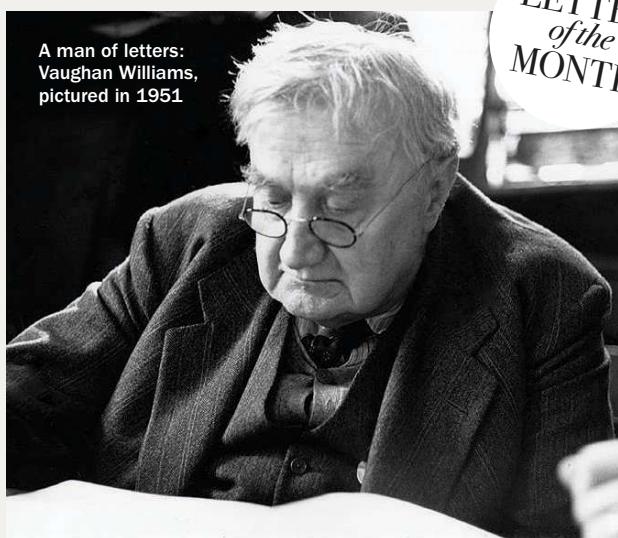


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A note from the doctor

The Bristol area connection with Vaughan Williams mentioned in *Liberating the Lark*, your December feature on *The Lark Ascending*, prompts me to mention another link. In 1951, Vaughan Williams was awarded the first Honorary Doctorate of Music by the University of Bristol, at a ceremony presided over by Sir Winston Churchill, chancellor of the University. Elizabeth Godfrey, a dear friend of mine who was a lifelong musician and teacher, became the first person to receive the degree of Bachelor of

Music from the university at this time. When she died in 2010, among her papers was a greetings telegram sent to her by the great man (who was known for his support of young musicians and performers) which read: 'Congratulations to BMus from DMus. RVW'. The original telegram is now in the university music department's archive.

*David Heymans,
North Somerset*

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A perfect setting

December's *The Lark Ascending* cover feature brought back a very particular memory. In, I think, the early 1980s, I taped a performance of *The Lark* broadcast on Radio 3. But it wasn't just the Romance; rather, it featured the whole poem read with it. It showed how the structure of Vaughan Williams's piece mirrors perfectly Meredith's complete text. That cassette has long since gone the way of all my cassettes, but it was a memorable marriage of music and words. I'm pretty sure the musicians were the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, directed by Neville Marriner. Iona Brown might even have been the soloist. As to the reader, I'm sad to say I have completely forgotten who it was. I wonder if there still lurks somewhere in the BBC's cavernous vaults a mastertape? It would be wonderful to hear it again. Perhaps one day it might even find its way onto another cover CD for *BBC Music Magazine*, or onto BBC Sounds, or both!

Philip Mitchell, Winchester

The Lark relieved

As a Shirehampton lad born and bred, I was very pleased to see a picture of Shirehampton Public Hall in your *Liberating the Lark* feature. It might also be of interest to readers that a performance in the Public Hall, with violin and piano,

as per the premiere, was organised and filmed by the BBC and televised in January 2012. The programme was presented by Dame Diana Rigg and featured the then 15-year-old Julia Hwang on violin and Charles Matthews on piano. It is currently available to watch on YouTube. But what happened to the blue plaque that, around the same time as the BBC film, was fixed to the Public Hall, to commemorate the premiere performance? Sadly, it seemed to have gone missing quite soon afterwards.

Mark Jones, Bristol

The editor replies:

We will try to find out about the fate of the blue plaque...

Missing voice

In Jessica Duchen's wonderful October article on suppressed music (*The Lost Generation*), all the composers mentioned were, indeed, superlative artists whose careers were either cut short or hampered by the politics of their time. One composer systematically overlooked in these discussions is Jaromír Weinberger (1896-1967). His legacy has been neglected by lack of scholarly interest as only a small amount of his output was available – or so it seemed. When viewed from the beginning of his career (which began, like Korngold, at the age of nine) it is evident he was at the forefront of various styles before settling

in what we erroneously call 'nationalism'. As in Kaufmann's case, Weinberger's materials have languished in an archive for nearly 60 years. At willemsmusiik.com, I have resurrected some of them and written articles on Weinberger, whose story is, I believe, as relevant now as it was during his lifetime, maybe more.

*Tristan Willems,
Prague, Czech Republic*

Delivering Delius

I was delighted to read Terry Blain's excellent article on the Wexford Opera Festival in the November issue. The festival organisers are to be heartily congratulated on their willingness to put on world-class performances of non-mainstream operas. Wexford has achieved the seemingly impossible by performing not only Delius's masterpiece *A Village Romeo and Juliet* in 2002 (it has never been performed professionally in London) but also his *Koanga* a few years later. Around 1982, the latter was scheduled for a first UK performance by English National Opera, when Willard White was available for the title part of the enslaved African Dahomey prince. However, due to financial cuts, it was cancelled and plans for a production never revived. Surely it is time that this production, a tale of slavery in the Americas, was revived.

David Green, Fakenham

Emerald opera

Ireland may not be blessed with many opera houses, but Wexford is not the only one that is purpose built, as stated in November's *Musical Destinations*. Belfast is home to Frank Matcham's wonderful Grand Opera House which, although having gone through

several identities in a long life, is now returned to its original splendour. It's worth noting, too, that 23 December will see the 125th anniversary of the opening of this iconic building.

Howard Rocke, Co. Durham

Words to ponder

For an astonishing musical novel (Letters, December), try *Charles Auchester* (1853) by Elizabeth Sara Sheppard, who knew many people in the early Victorian musical world. There is a composer based on Mendelssohn and the novel makes much of his Jewish ancestry. It also includes a young female composer who dies after conducting her own symphony! Sheppard was obsessed with Disraeli, who championed her, and another of her novels involves the production of an opera based on Disraeli's play *Count Alarcos*.

Andrew Baker, Stafford

Price is right

What a pleasure it was to hear Florence Price's Symphony No. 3 your November cover disc! Having been subjected to the likes of Copland, Bernstein and Gershwin for decades, it is wonderful to hear real American music from a black contemporary whose name should be better known. If Symphony No. 3 pricked your ears, be glad to know that Price was a prolific composer. For instance, listen to her *Mississippi River Suite* and then you can kiss *Billy The Kid*, *Porgy and Bess* and *West Side Story* bye-bye.

*Robert Harvey,
British Columbia, Canada*

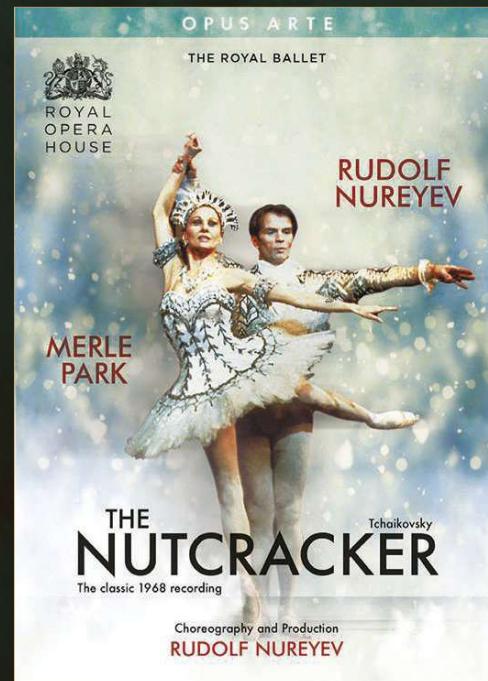
The editor replies:

We're delighted you enjoyed the Florence Price on our disc, though forgive us if we don't agree with you on Copland, Gershwin and Bernstein!



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The full score

Our pick of the month's news, views and interviews

Internet improvisation shines a light on dementia

Eighty-year-old composer's two-minute piece raises huge sums for charities



Paul Harvey, an 80-year-old composer suffering with dementia, has enjoyed an unexpected moment of fame after a film of him improvising at the piano became an internet hit. Harvey's two-minute improvisation has since enjoyed widespread coverage on TV, has been arranged and performed by the BBC Philharmonic and has inspired donations to charity, including one of £1 million.

The remarkable story began in September when Harvey's son Nick gave him four notes – F, A, D and B – to improvise upon and filmed the result. On being uploaded onto Twitter, it rapidly went viral and, at the time of going to press, has gone on to enjoy nearly two million views. When Radio 4's *Broadcasting House* featured the improvisation, listeners suggested that an orchestra should play it

– a challenge that was taken up by the BBC Philharmonic. Within a couple of days of the orchestra's *Four Notes – Paul's Song* being recorded and released, it had soared to the top of the charts.

Hailing from Stoke-on-Trent, Paul Harvey forged his early career as a pianist

Paul Harvey's son gave him four notes – F, A, D and B – to improvise upon

and composer – his *Rumba Toccata* has regularly featured in Associated Board exams – before turning his attention to school teaching. His ability to improvise on a theme of four random notes has long been a party trick, and stayed with him even after dementia was diagnosed

around five years ago. 'My memory's fine when I'm playing the piano,' he recently told the *Guardian*. 'I can remember all the things I've done. When I am looking at the television or other things around where I live, then I start forgetting things. And if something is not in the right place, then I panic a bit. But if I'm a bit stressed, I'll go and play the piano, and I'll be alright then.'

Among those who have been moved by Harvey's piece are the composer Stephen Sondheim, who has been in touch with Harvey in person, and the Scottish billionaire Sir Tom Hunter, who has expressed his appreciation by donating £1 million to be split between the Alzheimer's Society and Music for Dementia. Money raised from sales of the BBC Philharmonic's recording will also be donated to the two charities.



Steinway to heaven: the latest addition to the New York skyline

Piano keys open the door to a luxurious new flat

If you have a head for heights, a fondness for music history and, frankly, vast wealth, we think we have found the perfect home for you. As the construction of Steinway Tower on 111 West 57th Street, New York nears completion, apartments are now up for sale. Built on the site of the old Steinway Hall concert venue, the tower stretches an

impressive 435m high over 84 storeys. A nod to the building's past will be paid with the incorporation of a new recital hall into the design, while the sight of a Steinway grand will greet residents as they enter the lobby. With apartments ranging from \$8m (£6.1m) to \$66m (£50.5m), we ruefully concede that they may just be a little outside our budget.

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

2

...fine composers. Congratulations to James Mitchell and Paul Trepte, winners of the Royal College of Organists Composition Competition.

83

...million Euros well spent, as the Presidential Symphony Orchestra Concert Hall opens in Ankara, Turkey.

7

...more years at Deutsche Oper Berlin for conductor Sir Donald Runnicles, who has extended his contract.



4

...hours and 30 minutes of music by Scottish composer Stuart Macrae, played non-stop by violinist Fenella Humphreys (above) to highlight streaming payment issues.

SoundBites



Pianist with honour: Alexandra Dariescu

Romanian knight

There's some good news to round off the year for pianist Alexandra Dariescu, who has been awarded a knighthood in her home country of Romania for service to the arts. Born in Iasi, Romania's second city, Dariescu has spent half of her life in the UK but has continued to devote much of her time to promoting Romanian music and culture (see p45). A keen champion of female composers, she has also enjoyed great success with her *Nutcracker and I* series of concerts featuring solo pianist, dancer and on-stage projections.

Finn to carry on

The BBC Symphony Orchestra has revealed that its chief conductor Sakari Oramo has signed an extension to his contract that will keep him with the ensemble until at least September 2023. The Finn has been at the orchestra's helm since July 2013.

Hedge fund

Soprano Felicity Lott and Radio 3 presenter Petroc Trelawny are among those to have written contributions to a new book by Two Moors Festival founder Penny Adie that is being sold to raise funds for the Help Musicians charity. Featuring photos of hedgerow flowers that Adie has taken during lockdown, *Hope in the Hedgerows* will be on sale at hopeinthehedgerows.co.uk.

- Quiz Answers (from p104)
- 1. Peccati's la boème
- 2. Peter Il'yich Tchaikovsky
- 3. Dmitri Shostakovich
- 4. Claude Debussy
- 5. Henry Purcell
- 6. Roxanna Panufnik
- 7. Ralph Vaughan Williams
- 8. Emma Waldburgh Williams
- 9. Jean Sibelius
- 10. Heitor Villa-Lobos
- 11. The eaves (from p46) From left to right: Elie Gang Amadeus Mozart, Edward Elgar, Brahms, Smyth, Peter Maxwell Davies

Rising Stars

Three to look out for...

Jobine Siekman *Cello*



Born: Groningen, Netherlands

Career highlight: Last year, I was invited to play Schumann's Cello Concerto in Venezuela with the Simón Bolívar Orchestra. Plus, I put on a spontaneous performance of Klengel's *Hymnus* with a group of cellists.

Musical hero: Bach's music speaks directly to my heart. As a performer, cellist Anner Bylsma has made a real impression on me.

Dream concert: The Royal College of Music is helping me put on one of my dream concerts. We are filming a performance of Bach's Cello Suite No. 6, and some new works, on a five-stringed Amati cello piccolo.

Benson Wilson *Baritone*



Born: Auckland, New Zealand

Career highlight: Performing in English National Opera's 'Drive and Live' performance of Puccini's *La bohème* in the car park of Alexandra

Palace this summer. The rapturous applause of car horns made me realise how much the world needs and appreciates the arts.

Musical hero: My top three baritone heroes would be Quinn Kelsey, the late Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Piero Cappuccilli because they have rich, round voices and go the extra mile with their commitment to the text.

Dream concert: A BBC Prom with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, with vocal music of the South Pacific and a selection of my favourite Italian operatic arias.

Soohong Park *Pianist*



Born: Jeju Island, South Korea

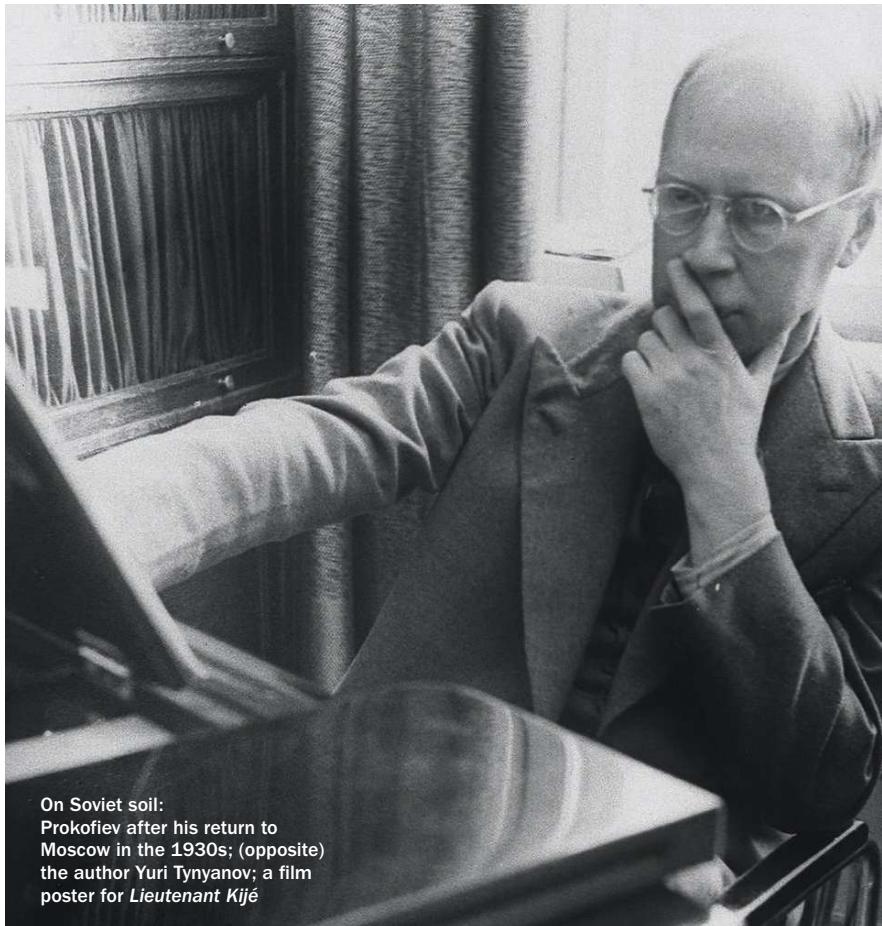
Career highlight: Winning Guildhall School's Gold Medal this year with my performance of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2. To allow

for social distancing, our performances took place in different spaces and were synced using low-latency technology.

Musical hero: I grew up listening to Arthur Rubinstein's recordings and have always admired the atmosphere he created.

Dream concert: It was a dream to watch Lisa Batiashvili play Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra under Barenboim at the BBC Proms. I hope I can give a similar experience to a Royal Albert Hall audience one day!

TIMEPIECE This month in history



CHRISTMAS 1934

Prokofiev's *Kijé* sleigh-rides through the Russian snow

The world premiere of Sergey Prokofiev's dazzling orchestral suite *Lieutenant Kijé*, broadcast live from Moscow on 21 December 1934, was a decisive event in Russian music. Not only did it signal a new, back-to-basics warmth and charm in Prokofiev's music, but also played a vital role in his return to the Motherland.

Since fleeing revolutionary Russia in 1918, Prokofiev had struggled to find a musical home conducive to his strikingly original talent. He initially spent four years in North America, where he completed two masterworks,

premiered within a fortnight of each other in December 1921 – the melodically enraptured Third Piano Concerto and *The Love of Three Oranges*, a scintillatingly inventive opera which epitomised his bracing creative fusion of 'the classical, innovative, motoric, lyrical and grotesque'.

Yet he never felt entirely happy on foreign soil. 'I wandered through Central Park,' he reflected despondently, 'and thought of the wonderful American orchestras that cared nothing for my music, and who recoiled at the first sign of anything new.'

A move to the artistic hustle and bustle of 1920s Paris hardly improved matters. 'Foreign air does not inspire me because I'm a Russian, the least suited of men to live in exile,' he despaired. Accordingly, much of the music he produced at this time – including the ballets *Le Pas d'acier* ('The Steel Step') and *The Prodigal Son*, the Third and Fourth Symphonies, and Fifth Piano Sonata – only fleetingly capture his inspiration operating at white heat.

From 1929, Prokofiev began reassociating himself with Mother Russia, and although Moscow hardly welcomed *Le Pas d'acier* with open arms, renewed contact with the Homeland appears to have inspired a poignant distillation of his musical essence in the Fifth Piano Concerto. The turning point came when – despite being unsure what 'sauce' to put on it – he agreed, at the author's suggestion, to compose the music for a forthcoming film adaptation of Yuri Tynyanov's waspishly comical tale, *Lieutenant Khize*.

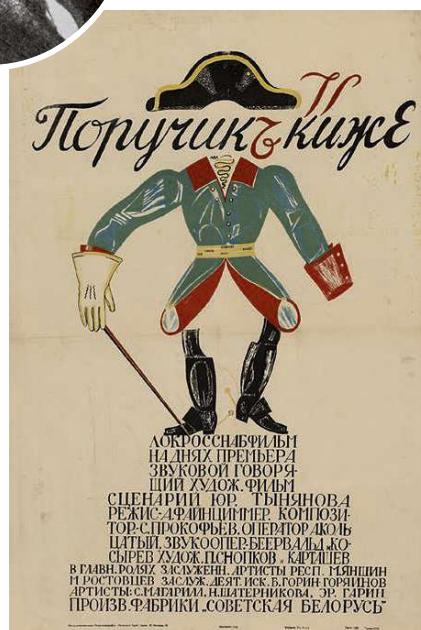
The story focusses on the eponymous soldier, whom Emperor Paul I assumes exists after spotting his distinctive name entered mistakenly in a set of official records. No one dares admit the clerical error, so an entire life history is quickly invented in order to save the situation. Prokofiev's initial reluctance was entirely understandable – after all, movie soundtracks were still in their infancy and he may also have been aware of the young Dmitri Shostakovich's early attempts at film music. Nevertheless, viewing it as a unique opportunity for his work to reach a wider audience and to collaborate with the director Aleksandr Feinzimmer on his first major feature, he set to work and produced 16 short numbers, lasting around 15 minutes.

In contrast to the more generalised, post-Romantic mood music prevalent at the time, Prokofiev meticulously wove his inspiration into the narrative fabric of the film, and in so doing created a

melodically enchanted, emotionally beguiling soundworld that would characterise much of his music during his period of repatriation. Although he was not especially keen on the film itself, the music was another matter. So when the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra suggested he might turn it into an orchestral suite, despite the immense task of rescore and restructuring involved – he despaired that the suite caused him 'more trouble than the film itself' – he was confident he could produce a sure-fire winner.

Prokofiev despaired that the suite caused him 'more trouble than the film itself'

The resulting five-movement suite enchanted audiences worldwide and has continued to do so, especially the 'Troika' fourth movement – an exhilarating sleigh-ride across the snow-laden Russian countryside, whose iconic status reached new heights of popularity when, in 1975, singer Greg Lake adapted it for his festive hit single, *I Believe in Father Christmas*. ☺



Political victim: Sergei Kirov in 1934

Also in December 1934

1st: **Sergei Kirov**, the head of the Soviet Communist Party in Leningrad and a member of the Politburo, is shot dead in his office by party member Leonid Nikolaev. The assassin, whose motivation for the attack remains unknown, is put on trial with several of his associates and subsequently executed. Stalin uses the killing as a pretext for launching his 'Great Purge' of political opponents.

2nd: Introduced as 'Un orchestre d'un genre nouveau de Jazz Hot', a quintet including guitarist Django Reinhardt and violinist Stéphane Grappelli gives its first public concert at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. Under the name **Quintette du Hot Club de France** the group goes on to record well over 100 discs over the next 14 years.

4th: The target of a backlash for defending composer Paul Hindemith, accused by the Nazis of writing 'degenerate music', conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler** resigns from his official state position of vice-president of the Reichsmusikkammer and also as general director of the Berlin State Opera and director of the Berlin Philharmonic.

7th: Wearing a specially designed suit that allows him to fly up to heights of around 50,000 feet, the US pilot Wiley Post discovers the **jet stream**, a significant breakthrough in the progress of aviation. The discovery comes a year after Post has become the first ever person to fly solo around the world, a journey made in seven days and 19 hours.

19th: The pianist **Francis Planté** dies in Saint-Avit, southern France, aged 95. One of the most important French pianists of the 19th century, Planté played regularly with Liszt, among others. He was also one of the first to make recordings – as someone who heard Chopin play in person, his interpretations of the composer's music were considered of great importance.

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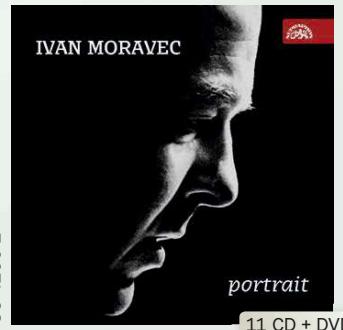
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NEW RELEASES



Ivan Moravec
Portrait



The most complete collection of recordings made by one of the greatest 20th-century pianists

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Doležal Quartet, Michaela Hrabánková oboe



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Oh, the lengths we have to go to...

A brouhaha kicked off on social media recently when university professor Chris White suggested in a newspaper article that all composers should be referred to by their full names, rather than just their surnames. White's reasoning was that such a convention would give living and dead, male and female, and white and non-white

composers equal gravitas – often, the latter in each instance tends to have their forename included. Though we won't wade into the argument ourselves, we hope he doesn't mean literally the full name. If we always have to refer to, say, Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini, we're rapidly going to run out of

DÉJÀ VU

History just keeps on repeating itself...

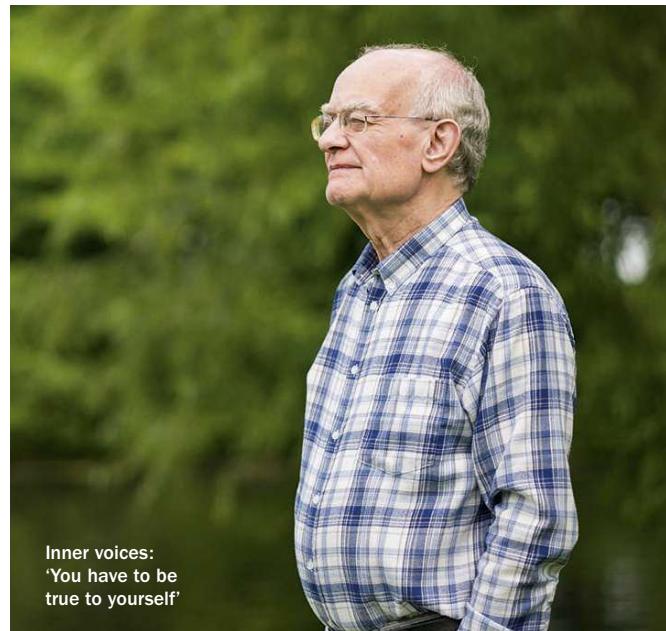


Here's cause for a celebratory oompah or two. Roland Szentpáli, a tuba professor at Budapest's Liszt Academy, and craftsman Zoltán Juhász have invented the 'twoba', a variation on the traditional instrument that, by means of a clever mechanism, can be adapted to enable tubists to play while standing up or walking around. Their invention is, of course, not the first to have come to instrumentalists' assistance over the years...

Pictures of early **cellos** show players resting the instrument on the ground, on footstools or on other props. The *Methode, Théorique et Practique pour Apprendre en peu de temps Le Violoncelle dans sa Perfection* of 1741 suggests that support be provided instead by a wooden 'baton', the forerunner of the metal spike. **Violinists** have composer Louis Spohr to thank for the chinrest, which he introduced in the 1820s. A virtuoso himself, Spohr wanted to take the violin's weight off the left hand, allowing the fingers to move more freely. Leaving the hands unencumbered to work their magic was also the idea behind pistons on **pipe organs**, by which combinations of stops can be pre-set and activated by pressing a button. Organ builder Henry Willis was exhibiting pistons at the 1851 Great Exhibition, but they were almost certainly around before then. And 30 years later, **double bassists** started to sound a bit lower, thanks to the 'C extension' which, added to the neck of the instrument, enables the bottom string to be played four semi-tones lower.

MEET THE COMPOSER

John Rutter



Inner voices:
'You have to be
true to yourself'

Thanks such pieces as *Shepherd's pipe carol*, John Rutter's name is synonymous with Christmas. This year, he has recorded an online Christmas celebration with members of the Royal Philharmonic and VOCES8 at St Alban's Cathedral, and arrangements of his choral works feature on a new piano recording by Wayne Marshall (Decca).

I went to a boys' school in north London and it had a chapel. Where there's a chapel there's generally a chapel choir and we had a very good one, conducted by our director of music Edward Chapman. He had been a pupil of Charles Wood in Cambridge – choral musicians all know Charles Wood from his collections of Christmas carols. He taught Chapman, who taught me, and so I wonder whether that's how the fondness for Christmas was passed down. **The first carol I wrote was *The Nativity Carol*.** I wrote it with the idea that my school choir would sing it; I must have been 16 at the time. It was a first step along the road and I probably figured that if it's awful, at least it's only awful for four minutes!

It felt natural to go to Cambridge, the home of King's College. David Willcocks, the conductor of King's choir, taught a weekly harmony and counterpoint class and suggested I bring him a sample of my work. I took along some odds and ends,

including several carols. He asked if I'd be interested in them being published; I wasn't going to say no to that. Not long after, he was looking for a co-editor for the second volume of the *Carols for Choirs* series and invited me. That really cemented my association with Christmas carols.

I stick to strict guidelines when writing carols. I'd say a carol has to have some sort of repetitive verse structure and, if possible, a recognisable tune – not necessarily one you can whistle, but it doesn't hurt if you write one that people will remember. It's also good to be connected to one of the three well-springs of music: song, dance or lullaby. Those were the parameters of early carol writers.

The best bit of advice I ever had was from Edward Chapman.

He told me to write the music that's in my heart and not to worry about what everybody else is writing. It's important to be sincere; if it's easy to grasp, or if some people say it's too sugary or sentimental, then tough! You have to be true to yourself.

Studio Secrets



Fugal art: pianist Filippo Gorini records Bach

We reveal who's recording what and where...

Violinist **Rachel Podger** and pianist Christopher Glynn have spent three days at St John's Church in Upper Norwood, London completing world premiere recordings of Mozart sonatas. The seven works, plus a fantasia, were all begun and abandoned during the 1780s and have now been completed by Timothy Jones. Channel Classics will release the recording next year.

Eight Songs from Isolation is the first opera written for socially-distanced performers. Conductor **Oliver Zeffman** commissioned the eight parts from composers including Helen Grime and Julian Anderson. The recording, which features Iestyn Davies, Sophie Bevan and more, has recently been released on Apple Music.

Pianist **Mahani Teave** was destined for a high-profile concert career, but returned to her native Rapa Nui (Easter Island) to build a music school for local children. 'Discovered' by a visiting tourist, she travelled to Seattle to record works by JS Bach, Chopin, Handel, Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Liszt. Rubicon releases *Rapa Nui Odyssey* in January.

Borletti-Buitoni Trust award-winning pianist **Filippo Gorini** is embarking on an ambitious project that will see him get under the skin of JS Bach's *The Art of Fugue*. The young artist will take the work on tour in a series of performances and lecture recitals. Gorini has already recorded the work for Alpha Classics, scheduled for release in the autumn of 2021.

Conductor **Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla** and the CBSO recently released an EP of Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* ahead of its 80th anniversary. The orchestral work, originally commissioned by the Japanese government in 1939 but later rejected, received its premiere in New York in 1941. The recording forms part of a new disc coming from DG in March called *The British Album*.



REWIND

Great artists talk about their past recordings

This month: **ELĪNA GARANČA** Mezzo-soprano

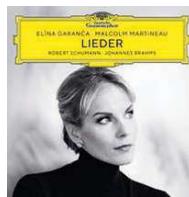
MY FINEST MOMENT

Schumann *Frauenlieben und -leben*

Elīna Garanča (mezzo-soprano),

Malcolm Martineau (piano)

DG 483 9210 (2020)



Schumann's song cycle has followed me since childhood. My mother was a singer and my first memory of this work is from around four years old. I've always said that certain music needs a certain experience and understanding, and I never felt I was ready to record it, though I sang it in many concerts. For *Frauenlieben* one has to have had very profound

experiences in life – meeting the one, getting married, having a baby and losing somebody very important. I didn't lose my husband, but what I did lose was my mum; I can translate the despair and pain of losing someone like that into the last song of this cycle, so it felt the right time to record it.

I love working with Malcolm Martineau; he has a huge amount of experience, but he's always keen to listen to my ideas – we are united through the fact that we both see songs in pictures. We usually describe them visually and we try to find the right colour through what we see. That makes my life incredibly easy. This is one of the recordings I am very proud of.



Turning point:
Revive proved an emotional album

for three years, or whatever it takes to change your repertoire; you still need to perform. This album provided a kind of revelation when I recognised a moment of questioning, a moment of doubt, a moment of being lost, insecure and unsure. It was very important for me, personally and emotionally.

Mascagni's Santuzza aria stands out, because while you have to maintain your dignity, you nevertheless have to move on, and sometimes you make mistakes. In that respect I'm very similar to Santuzza. If I could compare myself to that kind of a turning point, it's probably on this recording.

I'D LIKE ANOTHER GO AT...

Verdi *Requiem*

Elina Garanča (mezzo-soprano) et al;
Orchestra e coro del Teatro alla Scala,
Milan/Daniel Barenboim
Decca 478 5245 (2013)

I would be more than happy to go back and record the Verdi Requiem again. I did it in a live recording at La Scala with Daniel Barenboim, and it was my first Verdi Requiem in public. This is a monumental piece which also needs time and life experience, not to mention vocal expertise. I was coming from Mozart and bel canto; Verdi is another thing entirely. Back then I was still finishing some of the lighter roles and



these were the baby steps in singing my first Verdi; today I would be able to walk them as an adult. It was important for me,

however, to make that step and record it then; but now, after the experiences that I've had on the stage with different repertoire, I would be able to tackle the music much more easily. Vocally, I think I'm much more ready and my voice has developed different colours.

It would have to be a live recording, because it would give the performance a certain vulnerability. For the Verdi Requiem, there also has to be an atmosphere, and that can only be created when you are either in a church, in front of an audience, or you have a theatre that has a history. You have to have all of those components together.

Garanča's new album 'Lieder' is out on DG and will be reviewed in the January issue

MY FONDEST MEMORY

Mascagni *Cavalleria rusticana – Voi lo sapete, o mamma*
Elina Garanča (mezzo-soprano);
Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana/
Roberto Abbado
DG 947 95937 (2016)

Recording my *Revive* album was an emotional time for me, because it was when my mum died. I tried to portray women who have been, either by destiny or a political situation, thrown out of their comfort zone and forced to stand up and find their own way again. That was the situation for me, in a way, because not only had I lost my mother – my teacher, my advisor, my

main critic and person of reference – I had also lost my repertoire because I decided it was time to move on.

That gap between doing what you used to do and what you want to do is a sensitive time in an artist's life. You can't just disappear



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Buried Treasure



Clarinetist Mark Simpson uncovers three recordings from his own collection

Georges Lentz *Caeli enarrant – VII, Mysterium: Guyuhmgan*
Luxembourg Philharmonic/
Emilio Pomarico *Timpani 1C1184*



Georges Lentz is one of a kind; he actually plays violin in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. This piece blew my mind; it's so original and

unique. It forms part of a larger cycle and I just think it sounds like the dawn of time – particles formulating, life forming and the harmony of the spheres. A lot of his pieces have aboriginal titles, and Guyuhmgan translates as 'Stars'. It's musical, immediate and powerful.

Philippe Hersant

8 Duos for Viola and Bassoon
Andrea Bressan (bassoon), Mario Paladin (viola) *Brilliant 95211*



Hersant was a radio producer in France for a while, and his music is lyrical and heartfelt. The duets for bassoon and viola on this disc are

gorgeous; he originally wrote them for Pascal Gallois, who was an exponent of multi-phonics and circular breathing. They're kind of miniatures and each have very strong identities in terms of their musical characters.

Rameau *Dardanus – Lieux funestes*
John Mark Ainsley (tenor) et al;
Musiciens du Louvre/Marc Minkowski *DG Archiv 463 4762*



If you listen to just one track from this album, skip to 'Lieux funestes'. It's the moment where Dardanus has been captured and he's singing from prison about 'the dark places'. My field of speciality in music is normally 20th century-plus, but this opera – and this piece in particular – was a real discovery. It has a heartfelt depth to it and it's painful in the most expressive and beautiful way. The orchestral writing sets the scene for this desolate, empty, dark prison cell. Mark Simpson's 'Geysir' features on a new release, out now on Orchid Classics

The merry organ!



All hail the pipe organ – the instrument with an unparalleled sonic and spiritual power that, hopes **Tom Service**, will still form part of Christmas this year

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

Whether this Christmas we're allowed to experience fellowship and family in person, or whether we have to celebrate a digitally connected Yuletide, there's something we're going to need more than ever. And that's music – music that can bind us together, whose sonic and spiritual power can transcend the disillusion and despair of the present.

If there's one instrument and one repertoire than can instantly do just that, it's the organ, the instrument that's not just for Christmas but which awes us with a sense of scale and sheer power that no other can match.

In fact it's the biggest instrument that humanity has ever created, whether dominating cathedrals, concert halls or shopping malls, like the seven-storey Wanamaker Grand Court Organ at Macy's in Philadelphia. Its history goes back to Ktsebius of Alexandria in the third century BC, whose water-organ, a hydraulis, became one of the most prized technologies of the ancient world. Here was an instrument that could miraculously sustain polyphonic sounds indefinitely. (If he was playing anything at all, the Emperor Nero was playing his favourite hydraulis as Rome burned, not his lyre.) Over the centuries, water became bellows and mechanical energy became electricity as the hydraulis turned into the pipe organ, with its imposing sounds that simultaneously embody the sacred and worldly power of the church.

The organ's power to confound mortal time is on vivid display in a



church in Halberstadt in Germany. A performance of John Cage's *Organ2/ASLSP* ('As Slow As Possible') will play continuously until it finally finishes in the year 2639. But even on more manageable time-scales, the organ takes us to places of extreme sonic experience:

The organ awes us with a sense of scale and power that nothing else can match

in the 18th century, Bach's lifelong devotion to the organ as composer and improviser created a repertoire that glories both in human virtuosity and divine inspiration. Messiaen's 60 years at the church of La Trinité in Paris in the 20th century were another revelation of the organ's ceaseless creative power, like the overwhelming vision of his *Apparition de l'église éternelle* or the

Livre du Saint-Sacrement. And the organ is still an experimental inspiration for composers and musicians across the genres from performance art to pop, from Charlemagne Palestine to Anna von Hausswolff.

But whether the organ is scaling the heights of the sublime or accompanying communal carolling, this 'king of instruments', as Mozart called it, turns us all into its subjects when we hear it. The festive season is a time when we pay attention to the spiritual dimension of our lives, however we define it; and it's the organ that's so often the sonic bridge to that experience. In 2020, we need its community-creating consolation and its sonic awesomeness as urgently as we ever have done. ☺



Tom Service explores how music works in *The Listening Service* on Sundays at 5pm

FAREWELL TO...



Bolshoi success:
Vedernikov guided
its renaissance

Alexander Vedernikov Born 1964 Conductor

Music was in Alexander Vedernikov's blood, his father an acclaimed operatic bass and his mother an organ professor at the Moscow Conservatoire. Vedernikov studied there himself, while also working at a local theatre and serving as an assistant to Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra conductor Vladimir Fedoreyev. He went on to found his own orchestra – the Russian Philharmonia Symphony – where he served as chief conductor until 2004. While there, he also began a successful tenure at the Bolshoi Theatre, playing a key role in its renaissance. He brought a number of works back to the stage that hadn't been seen or heard there in decades. From the Bolshoi, he headed up the Odense Symphony and, in the last year or so, took on posts with the Royal Danish Opera and at St Petersburg's Mikhailovsky Theatre.

Arthur Wills Born 1926 Organist, composer

Few musicians of recent years have made as big an impact on English cathedral music than Arthur Wills. His 32-year tenure as Ely Cathedral's director of music alone sets him apart, but as an organist, composer and teacher Wills flourished and inspired countless musicians. Born in Coventry, Wills arrived at Ely as an assistant organist in 1949; he had an innate talent for the organ, making it sing in the cathedral, in recitals around the world and on numerous recordings. As a composer, the organ remained front and centre, but he also wrote song cycles, an opera (*Winston and Julie*), symphonic pieces and concertos. Wills was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music from 1964–92 and wrote an indispensable guide to the instrument he loved, simply titled *Organ*. He was made an OBE in 1990.

Ruth Falcon Born 1942 Soprano, teacher

The legacy of New Orleans-born soprano Ruth Falcon lives on in the voices of Deborah Voigt, Nadine Sierra, Kate Lindsey and Danielle de Niese – to name a few. The soprano was herself embarking on a promising stage career when she began teaching as a sideline. Prize-winning in her early years, she made her New York City Opera debut in 1974 and two years later joined the company of Bavarian State Opera. Her Met debut in 1989 was shortly followed by her first steps into teaching; the results spoke for themselves and it was clear where her destiny lay. Falcon worked with young artist programmes across the US and taught at New York's Mannes School of Music for 30 years.

Also remembered...

John Sessions (born 1953), the actor, writer and comedian, was a good friend of, and occasional contributor to, *BBC Music Magazine*. Born in Ayrshire, Sessions made a name for himself with his one-man shows in the 1980s, followed by familiar turns on TV, radio and film.

THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Intimate Reading of Handel's Messiah

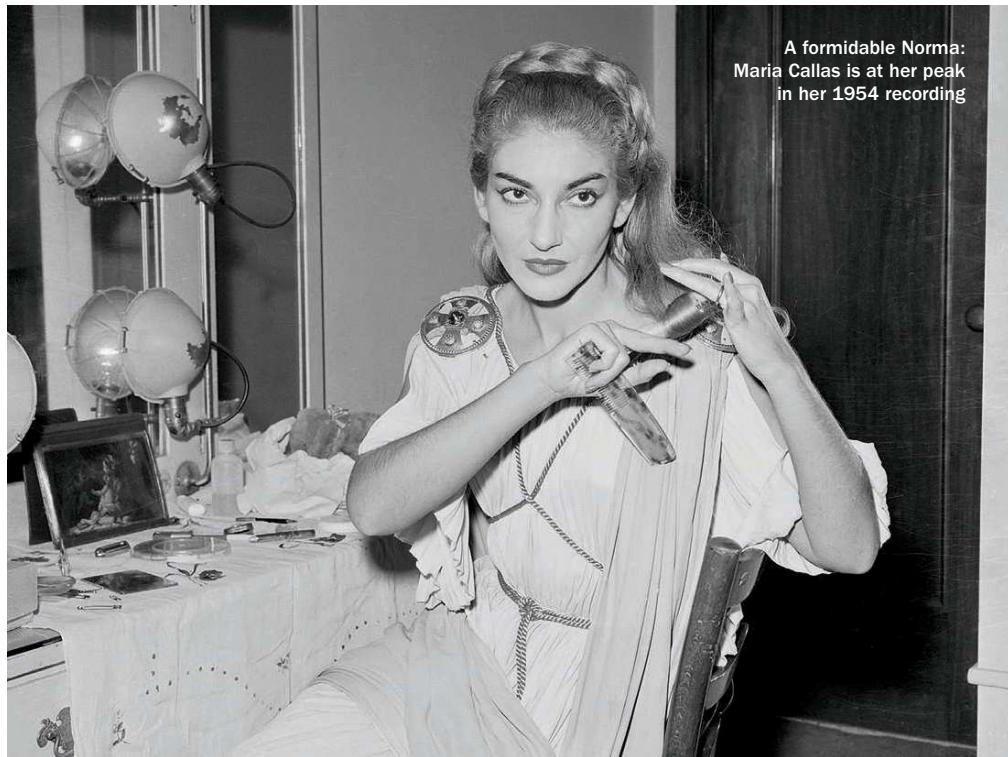
Julia Doyle, Tim Mead, Thomas Hobbs,
Roderick Williams, RIAS Kammerchor Berlin,
Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Justin Doyle



Beethoven Complete Symphonies

WDR Symphony Orchestra, Marek Janowski





wrote on the score is merely being channelled through his fingers.

And also...

David Attenborough's *A Life on Our Planet* is one of the most important things I have watched recently. Having travelled all over the world, he is a person who has seen at first hand the monumental scale of our impact on nature and he shows how we can reverse what we've done. His message comes across so clearly, and it is also a spectacular documentary.

Lara Melda Plays Chopin is out now on Champs Hill Records

Ken Burton

Conductor and composer



I'm a big lover of **Beethoven**, and have been listening a lot to his Seventh Symphony. I like to listen to his

symphonies with the score, seeing what is going on in the engine room: Beethoven sometimes dares to do things that you don't pick up just by listening. It's wonderful to see how he manipulates rhythm and how energising that can be – the emotion of the Seventh's last movement is a real pick-me-up. You can just imagine Beethoven saying 'Let's go!'

When I heard the Chineke! Orchestra perform **Florence Price's** Third Symphony at the Royal Festival Hall, I was both blown away and deeply moved by it. Price cites her influence as being Dvořák's Ninth, which was inspired by the native cultures of America, and she herself also brings together these different sounds. So you have a journey on which you experience the sounds of Indian-American music, then it goes African-American, quite jazzy, quite bluesy... and you also have western art music in there. It shows what a unifier music is.

I performed **Britten's** *St Nicolas* at university, but had forgotten about it until recently. There's a performance of it on YouTube by Downtown Voices that I really enjoy. I love the Britten approach

Music to my ears

What the classical world has been listening to this month

Lara Melda Pianist



I remember hearing Alfred Cortot's 1934 recording of **Chopin's** Barcarolle, preludes and impromptus when I was about ten, and being struck by the honesty of his playing. He showed how perfection can be achieved through musicality rather than just the right notes. You can really feel the closeness, the gentle clarity and the poetic nuances – it's as if he's whispering into your ear.

Whenever I listen to **Bellini's** *Norma*, I imagine Chopin having gone to the opera in Paris and writing a piece of music inspired by what he heard. In her 1954 recording, Maria Callas really captures the emotion of the title role. This is when her voice was in its early prime, and although

READERS' CHOICE

Geoffrey James

Northumberland
One gratifying aspect during this difficult period has been the opportunity to sample the discography of **Sakari Oramo**. He is an exceptional conductor of great musicality – it has been a privilege to listen to your stunning cover discs of Villa-Lobos and a superbly paced and alive performance of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. His brilliance in interpreting composers like Nielsen is allied to his quest to unearth all-but-forgotten rarities, and his two discs of John Foulds's music are particularly treasured by me.

it's a long ride, she really has the stamina for it plus the musical intelligence to sustain all the increases in hurt and rage that drive on towards the tragic finale.

Schubert was another composer whose piano writing was inspired

Alfred Brendel's playing of Schubert's Impromptus is absolutely magical

by the voice, and on Alfred Brendel's 1997 recording of his complete Impromptus, the playing is absolutely magical. It is delicate yet noble, and also intellectually respectful yet warm and sweet. The notes aren't difficult in these pieces, but that's not really the point – there are no theatrics from Brendel, and what Schubert

of bringing everything together: amateurs with professionals, children with adults, and even the audience gets involved too. Within it, I absolutely love 'His piety and marvellous works', which is gorgeous and syrupy and full of harmonic progressions that never fail to send me to heaven.

And also...

In the light of everything that has happened over the summer, I have been reading a lot about the history of empire, colonialisation and slavery, but also going more deeply into **African history** beyond the more familiar stories of oppression. For me, it's been a matter of making sense of it all and being able to engage in the narrative and discussion of it.

Ken Burton is one of the judges of the Radio 3 Breakfast Carol Competition, whose winner will be revealed on 18 December

Jennifer Koh Violinist



As a commissioner of new music, I spend a lot of time online searching for composers that the rest of the music world hasn't discovered yet. As I'm giving the premiere of **Tyshawn Sorey**'s Violin Concerto, I've been listening to his album *Pillars*. It explores stillness and internal life, which feels so relevant at the moment. Every day feels the same because we see fewer people and fewer things, but there are slight differences in terms of the colours around us and how the light falls.

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I also collect historical recordings, such as **Bartók**'s live recording from the Library of Congress with the violinist Joseph Szigeti. You realise what an elegant pianist Bartók was, and in this recording you witness how he listens to music. He's actually very Classical in style, and makes you realise that his own compositions weren't eclectic, randomised music: it's all still structured.

The violinist Bronisław Huberman

Huberman was not just an amazingly imaginative artist, he was also incredibly socially conscious. He was responsible for saving the life of my teacher Felix Galimir, one of the Jewish musicians in the Vienna Philharmonic – at the time, countries weren't accepting boats of refugees, so Huberman brought him to Palestine. His recording of Brahms's Violin Sonata on the album *Huberman in Recital*

READER'S CHOICE



Hugh Allen Wiveliscombe

While ironing the other day, I listened to **Hummel**'s Piano Trios Nos 1, 4 & 5 on CD. I expect some of your readers might be horrified that some of my attention was directed towards the ironing board, but it is, for me, quite a tight discipline to give my total attention to whole pieces of music while avoiding distractions. However, I enjoyed the music immensely and only regret that I couldn't thank the Gould Piano Trio in person.



Calm composer: Tyshawn Sorey explores stillness

is fascinating. In fact, Brahms himself allegedly heard the young Huberman play and was brought to tears.

And also...

I gave the keynote speech at a conference called *Orchestrating Isolation*, which looked at the decolonisation that's needed in western artforms. I read a lot around the subject, namely *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* by **Cathy Park Hong**. My mission is to make classical music more equal and inclusive of both women and people of colour.

Jennifer Koh performs on Mythologies, a new disc of works by Anna Clyne on the Avie label

Our Choices

The BBC Music Magazine team's current favourites

Oliver Condy Editor

Messiaen's masterpiece for the organ *La Nativité du Seigneur* contains one of the instrument's most thrilling movements. Starting with huge chords depicting the descent of God to earth, 'Dieu parmi nous' progresses through moments of serene calm and images of fluttering angel wings towards a dazzling toccata that combines rapid cluster chords and a thunderous descending pedal motif. I'd better get practising.

Jeremy Pound Deputy editor

Respighi's *Three Botticelli Pictures* doesn't make it onto that many Christmas playlists, probably because its outer two movements have the distinctly unfestive titles of 'Spring' and 'The Birth of Venus'. The central 'The Adoration of the Magi', however, takes the familiar 'Veni, veni, Emmanuel' tune as its starting point and weaves its magical way from there. It is wonderfully atmospheric, and imbued with an orientalism

similar to the same composer's *Belkis, Queen of Sheba*.

Alice Pearson Cover CD editor

If you're partial to a bit of ballet music over the festive season and 'been there, done that' with *The Nutcracker*, why not try *Les Patineurs*? Choreographed to music by **Meyerbeer** and arranged by the composer Constant Lambert, who was the founding music director of the Royal Ballet, it's a magical and nostalgic evocation of a skating party on a frozen lake.

Michael Beek Reviews editor

I'm looking forward to playing some of my favourite festive albums this Christmas, not least **Henry Mancini**'s music for the 1985 film *Santa Claus – The Movie*. It opens with the voice of



a young Aled Jones and later features an epic arrangement of carols called *Christmas Rhapsody*. Then there's *A Classic Christmas*, an almost 30-year-old EMI disc which, as every year, will accompany my wrapping.

Freya Parr Editorial assistant

Rather than striding out to do my usual wintry rounds of carol services and festive choir concerts, I'll be turning to choral music at home with my knitting. The ORA Singers' new recording of **Tallis**'s *Spem in alium* is proving worthy company thanks to its thick, knotty textures in glittering sound quality. It's comforting for my ears, which delude themselves into thinking they're in the company of 40 majestic voices, rather than just my two long-suffering housemates.

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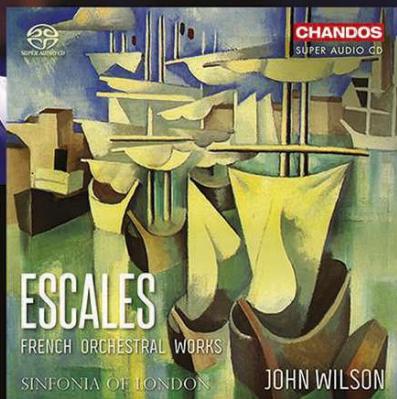
SINFONIA OF LONDON

JOHN WILSON

CHSA 5261

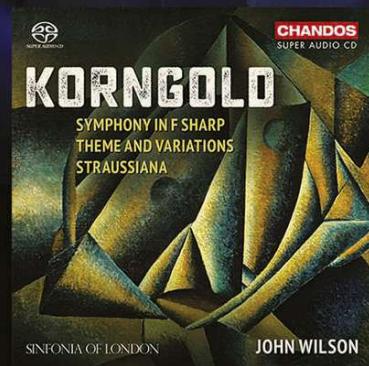
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STAY IN THE KNOW



Richard Morrison

Musically this year, Christmas will be different, so let's make the most of it

Like me, you are probably wondering what Christmas will be like this year. Right now I don't think anyone has much of a clue – not even Santa himself.

My feelings about this winter's festive season veer rather manic-depressively between two famous passages of poetry, both set to music several times. On my good days I recall those wonderfully aspirational lines from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, in which he commands church bells to 'Ring out false pride, the civic slander and the spite', and in their place 'Ring in the love of truth and right... The larger heart, the kindlier hand'.

On my bad days I'm haunted by the feeling in TS Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* that even a long-desired spiritual rebirth can be hugely painful. I suppose that resonates so much at the moment because I've met a lot of musicians who have said 'at least the pandemic and all the disruption will force us to reassess what's really important and make a fresh start next year'. Yes it might, but don't underestimate the trauma involved if people really want to shake up the musical world.

But I get ahead of myself. First, let's make the best we can of what musical opportunities there are during this strange Christmas. Apart from cheering us up, the thousands of singers and instrumentalists finding ingenious ways to present 'COVID-proof' seasonal music-making this December deserve total support because, in many cases, the finances of entire organisations depend on it.

So if musicians in your area are managing to present live carol services or concerts – possibly by running several a day to socially-distanced spectators

– then do make every attempt to attend them. However good the performances you hear, the musical effort involved will probably represent the tip of the iceberg compared to the logistical challenges that have been overcome to get the event happening at all.

It might be, however, that an extended lockdown stops all live events. In which case I see from the excellent list compiled by this magazine that many cathedral and other choirs are already gearing up to offer streamed online versions of their Advent and Christmas

If choirs in your area are presenting live carol concerts, then do make every attempt to attend

services. Without wishing to turn the whole thing into a kind of Ding-Dong of the Year competition, what a glorious opportunity to compare and contrast, say, King's College, Cambridge and St Paul's Cathedral, or York Minster and St Albans Cathedral. And all without leaving your living room!

I also see that several of the 'Zoom choirs' formed by enterprising choral directors during the first lockdown are offering singalong carols for those who miss roaring out their felicitations to little donkeys or virgin mothers. Indeed I wonder if the irrepressible Gareth Malone might lead us in a national 'moment', where we fling open our doors or windows and bawl 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' at the empty streets? Or whether, if indoor festivities

are banned while COVID is around, there might be a widespread revival of outdoor wassailing, with carol-singers going round the houses begging for figgy pudding and mulled cider – just like it's 1850 all over again in Thomas Hardy's *Wessex*.

Perhaps, though, music lovers should make this the Christmas when they give familiar carols a year off, and instead use online streaming services to explore less well-trodden byways of Christmas music. With all respect to the giants of the genre – Bach, Handel and John Rutter – I have to confess that my own Christmas favourites come from much less famous composers. I wonder if you can guess which pieces I have in mind if I mention the names Marc-Antoine Charpentier, William Billings (there's a fabulous Kathleen Battle recording), Elizabeth Poston, Gerald Finzi, Heinrich Schütz, Gian Carlo Menotti, Jan Dismas Zelenka, Kenneth Leighton and of course Mel Tormé. You can? Well, sorry, there's no prize, except the sort of smug satisfaction that comes from winning a pub quiz without googling the answers on your mobile.

Actually, mention of pubs reminds me of the seasonal tradition I'm going to miss most, because I've done it every 24 December for 43 years. It's going into the boozer next to the church where I play the organ and dragging out the choir for midnight mass. But this year? Will the pub still exist? Will the choir? Will midnight mass?

Who knows? I just hope that, in spite of everything, you all have a merry Christmas, and that 2021 turns out to be a lot happier than 2020. ☺

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times



Stellar career: John Williams conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2009; (opposite) with Star Wars's C3PO in 1980

Maestro of the MOVIES

John Williams may be the most celebrated film composer alive, but there's more to him than *Star Wars*. He tells Michael Beek about starting out, his concert works and his debut with the Vienna Philharmonic

I write every day – it's a good habit,' begins John Williams who, even at 88, maintains a strict regime when it comes to work. 'I always say that music, for musicians at least, is our oxygen and we need that to keep functioning.'

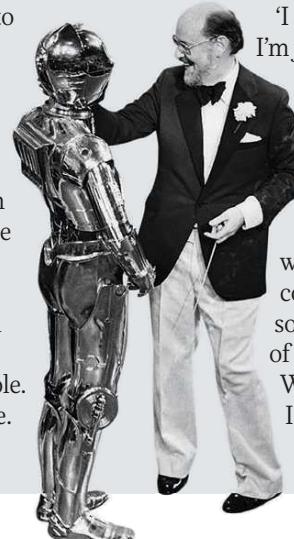
The air must be very good for Williams; with a career spanning some 64 years, and with five Academy Awards and over 100 feature film scores to his credit, he'd be forgiven for wanting to take it easy.

Despite what has been a legendary career on film, not to mention being one of American music's most familiar figures, he's as down to earth as they come. That he telephones me himself from his home in Los Angeles is indicative of the kind of man Williams is; warm, softly spoken and eminently humble. For him, music is a way of life.

TODD ROSENBERG, GETTY

We speak just days after he received the news that he has been honoured with the Royal Philharmonic Society's highest honour, the Gold Medal. He joins an esteemed group of artists, many of whom he himself holds in the highest regard, from his late friend Leonard Bernstein (the only other American winner) and the likes of Brahms, Britten and Shostakovich. Williams is understandably delighted, but muses on it with quiet pride.

'I am so honoured and privileged; I'm just sorry that I won't be able to come over, but it is thrilling,' he tells me. 'I've been a lover of British music for all my life, in kind of reverse order in a certain sense. I really began with affection for Walton, which so many of my younger colleagues also loved – especially some of the jazz musicians. Then of course there's Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Britten. So I think I understand a little bit of the ➤





Film harmonics:
Williams with Anne-Sophie
Mutter and the Vienna Phil
in January 2020

feel of British music history, and the great importance of this award. It's something indescribable for me and I'm very proud.'

The RPS honour bookends an obviously unusual year – like so many musicians, Williams has seen numerous concerts cancelled. Thankfully, one did take place before the world changed: the composer's remarkable debut conducting the Vienna Philharmonic back in January. It was an invitation he says he couldn't resist. 'I had a magnificent time there; the orchestra is so fabulous and it was a compliment to allow me to conduct them at all,' he reflects. He admits he didn't know quite what to expect from the occasion, but was thrilled with the results. 'The repertoire we played was obviously my own film music, which is such a deviation from what they usually do; but they were enormously friendly and warm, and clearly brilliant in their playing. I was particularly interested in how the brass section would respond, because a lot of this music is done for purposes in film

'The orchestra is so fabulous and it was a compliment to allow me to conduct'

and some of it can be excessively brassy and difficult. But it was as brilliant as you can imagine. They perfectly captured the stylistic essence of what it was.'

He got a particular kick out of being asked for even more music by the brass section, a story he clearly enjoys telling. 'At the intermission of one of the rehearsals, the players came and said to me "Maestro, can we play *The Imperial March* (from *Star Wars*)?" And I said, "well certainly we can; if you have the music, I'd be happy to conduct it." "Oh we have the music," they said, "we know it!" I told them I thought

I'd already given them too much work for a two-hour concert, and they said "well you have, but we want to play *The Imperial March* for you; it's the new *Raetetzky*!" I've never heard it played so brilliantly, I must say. All the brilliant orchestras I've played it with have never been quite like this; it had a kind of force and power that was an expression of their own spirit and history. It was really quite thrilling.'

The affection of the orchestra for their conductor on the night was obvious – the whole concert was filmed and released on Blu-ray by the record label Deutsche Grammophon – so too the warmth from the audience in the *Musikverein*. Violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, a guest soloist, recalls the event with glee. 'John was in heaven, the orchestra was in heaven, and so was the audience. There was such joy, such appreciation and a feeling of cameraderie in music. Together with my debut with Karajan this was the greatest musical moment in my life.'



Hit parade: (left) Williams's father, jazz drummer Johnny Williams Sr; (below) the late Arthur Fiedler looks on as Williams prepares for his first night with the Boston Pops; (bottom) a poster for his first film, *Cinderella Liberty* (1973), music from which Williams arranged for Anne-Sophie Mutter

of thing. But André said "No, write it for Anne-Sophie, she can play anything!" And she did it so beautifully, with what I would take as a middle-American, even Southern, kind of texture and feeling. It put all my fears aside.'

Including the piece on the album, and in the Vienna concert, also gave Williams what he says was the 'marvellous' opportunity to share some lesser-known film works with his audience, beyond those they might expect – or even demand. That he didn't throw in the likes of his main theme from *Jaws* – instead including the nautical 'Out to Sea' and the dramatic 'Shark Cage Fugue' – shows he could trust them to go where he wanted to take them.

One place he didn't take them was into his growing catalogue of concert works; beyond the ceremonial, occasion-led pieces he has become known for (including several for the Olympics), Williams has composed many concertos, a symphony and a number of chamber works. It's an aspect of his work that serves as a much-needed diversion from his day job.

'My work away from film has always been a kind of amusement for me,' he muses, 'a way of enjoying a break from the strictures and demands of film music, and to simply write something that might feel personal. I actually never expected any of it to be performed, to tell you the truth; I feel very unpretentious about it all.'

The majority of Williams's concertos and other concert works have been written since the 1990s, with pretty much all of them written with a particular soloist in mind – his latest work is a violin concerto for Anne-Sophie Mutter. He tells me he finds joy and inspiration in writing for specific artists. 'When I was conductor at the Boston Pops, every year or two I would write a concerto; it was a way of giving a gift to one of my players,' he says. 'Even with things like *Schindler's List*,'



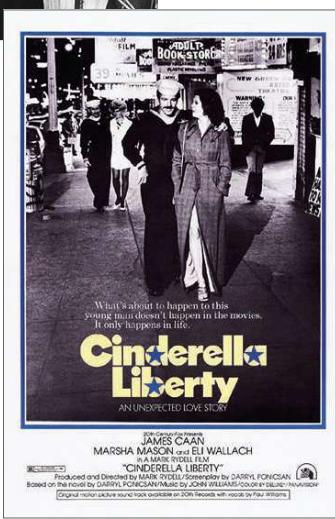
Musical offerings

Works for people, places and plinths

John Williams has composed over 60 non-film works. The majority of them were written after he became conductor of the Boston Pops, and many with specific soloists in mind.

One of his earliest works, a Flute Concerto (1968), was written for flautist Sheridan Stokes and gave the composer the opportunity to do what he says he 'wouldn't have been allowed to' in film music at the time. His 1985 Tuba Concerto, premiered by Chester Schmitz (above), marked the centenary year of the Boston Pops, while his 1993 Bassoon Concerto for the 150th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic was premiered by Judith LeClair. The LA Phil's clarinettist Michele Zukovsky was gifted a concerto in 1991, while Dale Clevenger was the inspiration for Williams's 2003 Horn Concerto. Boston musicians have always been top of the list, and in 2009 the Symphony Orchestra's then harpist, Ann Hobson Pilot, inspired the composer to pen his Harp Concerto, *On Willows and Birches*.

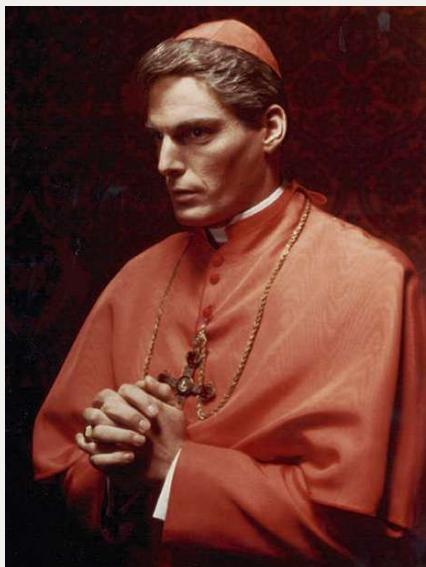
Perhaps the only wedding gift on the list is *Sound the Bells!*, which Williams dedicated to Princess (now Empress) Masako of Japan. He premiered it during a Pops tour of the country in the summer of 1993. Fanfares have also been a cornerstone of Williams's non-film work, the composer dedicating pieces to people (politician Michael Dukakis, Prince Philip); places (Boston's Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox baseball team); and landmarks (the Statue of Liberty, left).



Mutter and Williams have formed quite a special partnership of late, having worked together on an album project (2019's *Across the Stars*). It's a collaboration the composer says has been 'a particular treat' and it followed his short work for the violinist, 2017's *Markings*. The album saw Williams reimagine some of his film themes for violin and it was his life-long friend the late André Previn – to whom Mutter was once married – who ultimately persuaded Williams to put his themes back on the piano. One in particular was a favourite of Previn's, that written for the 1973 film *Cinderella Liberty*, but the composer says he took some convincing.

'It's kind of a jazzy piece with a lot of repeated notes, not exactly a violin kind





Superior man: Christopher Reeve in *Monsignor*

Williams's hidden gems

Five film scores you may not know

Not With My Wife, You Don't! (1966)

Williams's early film career saw him score a handful of adult-themed comedies. Writing under the name 'Johnny', his music for this film starring Tony Curtis is typical of the period: light, jazzy and with songs featuring lyrics by Johnny Mercer.

Images (1972)

By the 1970s Williams was going by the more mature 'John'. His work, too, took on a more grown-up tone, the composer scoring arthouse and independent films. This Robert Altman thriller inspired Williams to write his most unusual score to date, with percussion effects by the Japanese artist Stomu Yamash'ta.

Heartbeeps (1981)

This sci-fi comedy about a pair of escapee robots saw a rare film turn by the comedian Andy Kaufman. Though featuring the musicians of the Hollywood Studio Symphony, it has the most electronics yet heard in a Williams score.

Monsignor (1982)

Williams retrofitted his faintly comic *Esplanade Overture* from the same year into this score, for a film about a seductive Vatican priest and starring Christopher Reeve. An excerpt of the Latin mass features in the striking *Gloria* for choir and organ.

Rosewood (1997)

For this unflinching take on the 1920s massacre of a small African-American community, Williams drew on his experience of arranging gospel music in the 1960s. It features three original choral spirituals: 'Look Down, Lord', 'Light My Way' and 'The Freedom Train'.

Over the moon: (right) Williams thanks Itzhak Perlman at a recent gala concert; (below right) winning a fourth Oscar, for *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, presented by Cher and Plácido Domingo in 1983

the film was a great inspiration, but it was also inspiring for me that Itzhak (Perlman) would be our soloist. Just sitting down and writing and thinking about his sound was a big part of it, in my mind. In Anne-Sophie's piece I've tried to capture certain mannerisms I've noticed that she has.'

Williams was principal conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra for some 15 years from 1980; he was succeeded by Keith Lockhart, but remains the ensemble's laureate conductor. His tenure with the Pops was legendary, benefiting from his popularity as a film composer certainly. It also gave Williams a further creative outlet and, like writing concertos, was a useful change of pace from the day job. He reveals that conducting wasn't really something he had in mind, until he was called on to fill in for a poorly Arthur Fiedler. The conductor was due to appear with the LA Phil at the Hollywood Bowl in 1978; Williams takes up the story.

'Ernest Fleischmann (executive director of the LA Phil) called and said "John, Mr Fiedler is ill; you have to come and conduct his concerts this weekend." I think I had one rehearsal – the programme was mostly Gershwin – and I was very reluctant to do it. Ernest kept insisting, telling me I had to come and conduct. Then he wanted to have me there every year; so, really, without Fleischmann I don't think I would have ever stepped in front of the public to conduct. I certainly never had any intention of doing so.'

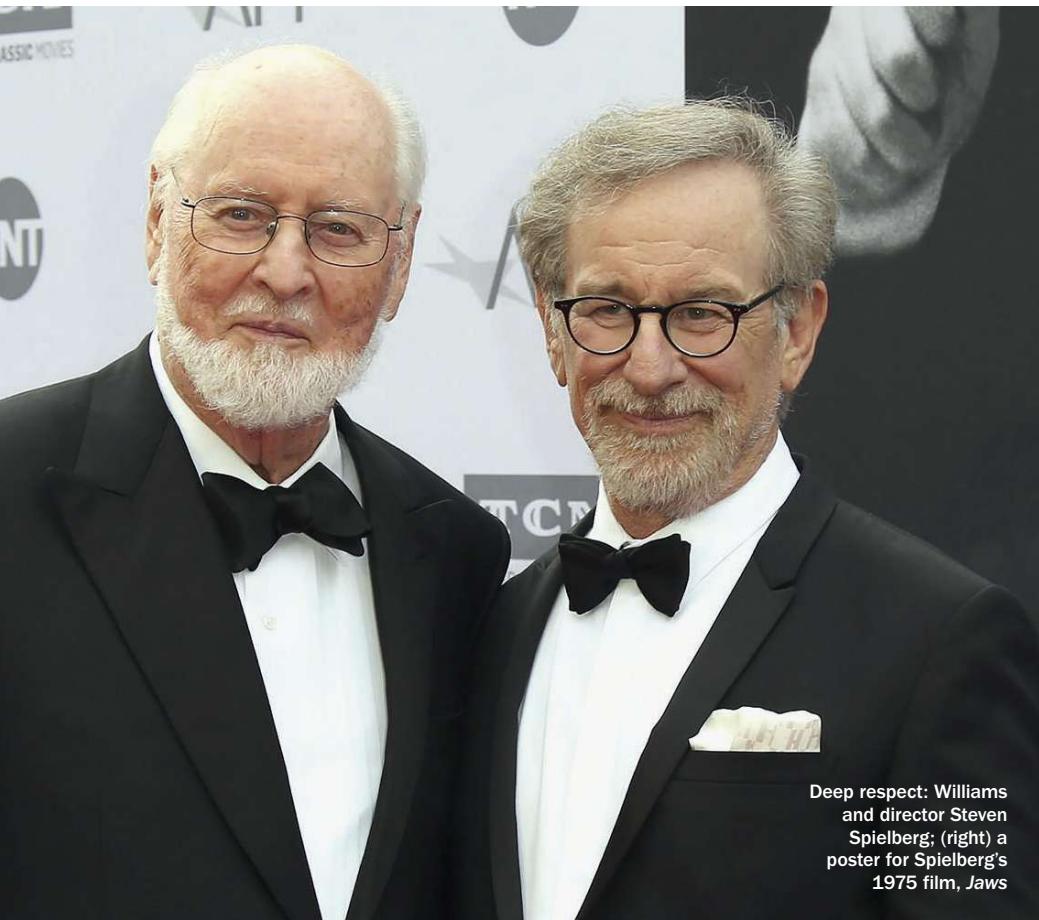
When Fiedler died a few years later, Williams was offered his post in Boston and so began a new life on the podium, bringing his own music to live audiences, programming popular concerts and undertaking recordings. It was a period which necessarily meant the composer needed to step into the limelight, an unusual but fulfilling experience for him, as he explains: 'To get before an audience and make music with a great orchestra was a respite from what I was doing. I enjoyed this double life of being a public man and a very private monk, sitting in a room alone with a piano and sketch pad. The duality became refreshing; it gave me energy. I don't think of myself as a professional conductor, but I've always loved it.'

Composing film music will always be his main focus; indeed he believes it's



probably the only aspect of his writing that has any real value. That is, of course, doing himself a disservice, but that's the composer's way. When asked about looking back at his work for the screen, and whether he is particularly happy with or surprised by anything he now hears, Williams is typically modest.

'There are some individual things that I've done – *The Imperial March* seems to me a perfectly shaped piece that works very well. I could probably name half-a-dozen other little things, but my character and psychology is one of being self-critical and wanting to improve things,' he tells me. 'I have to say that I don't listen to things that I've done in the past almost ever; once in a while I might have a reason to, but my reaction is usually "oh that's pretty good, but it would be better if I had done this or that." I have a self-critic placed deep within



Deep respect: Williams and director Steven Spielberg; (right) a poster for Spielberg's 1975 film, *Jaws*

me and I don't think I can ever really feel perfect satisfaction.'

Still writing with pencil and paper at the piano, Williams's way of working hasn't really altered, but what about his approach? Would he score the likes of 1975's *Laws* differently in 2020?

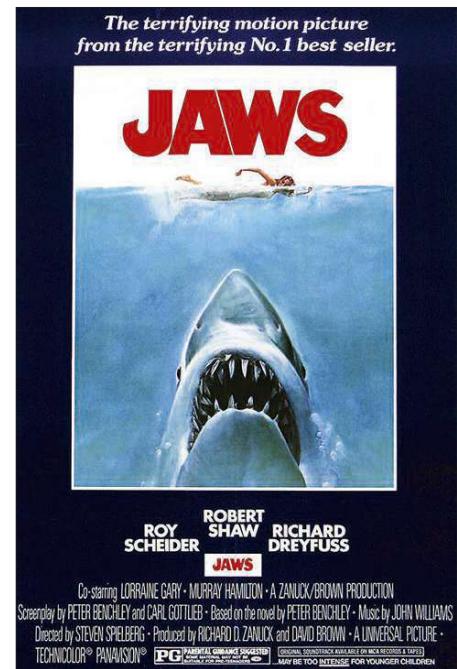
'Probably I would; it's hard to say. We evolve and we think we know more than we knew then; but that can be a deception, because we had a different kind of energy then, a different kind of naivety, if you like. I'm at a point in life where I'm very changed; my body is not the same as it was 50 years ago – my health is good by the way – but health, energy, enthusiasm and environment will affect what we do and how many hours we can sit and do it. I don't think I could do what I did 40 to 50 years ago.'

That said, *Star Wars* is perhaps something of an exception. Williams completed his ninth score for the film series just last year. For the composer, being able to build on a body of music he began in 1977 has been 'a privilege' and it's a creative feat unmatched by any composer before him. It's just one of many surprises

‘I have a self-critic
deep within me
– I don’t ever feel
perfect satisfaction’

and joys for Williams in a long career that started in the 1950s when he was a jobbing session musician and arranger in Hollywood, as he recalls. 'I have been very fortunate; I can't say I was "mentored" by people like Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Newman, but in retrospect they befriended me; they would ask me to their homes for dinner and I didn't think about any of it. I took it all pretty much in my stride. I worked as a pianist for these composers and some of them would begin to ask me to orchestrate things, which I could do, and eventually write scores for television shows.'

It was his father, the jazz drummer Johnny Williams Sr, who brought the family to Los Angeles from New York.



when Johnny Jr was a teenager. With his father performing in film scoring sessions, it was the most natural thing in the world to take to for the young musician. But composing wasn't particularly something he planned on, as he continues. 'I don't think I can say it was something I always wanted to do; it was just part of an evolution, a series of good luck turns. I can't say to you that aged 22 I wanted to be a film composer; I didn't have aspirations that high, frankly. I was interested in piano, I'd studied it, and was a fairly good pianist and a reasonably good sight reader – which helped in the studio work. I was blessed with a kind of luck and, fortunately, I was able to do the work when it came along. But it was not part of a plan or an ambition of mine. I simply put one foot in front of the other.'

Those footsteps have brought Williams accolades, admiration and fans around the world. His work ethic, as strong as ever, means he doesn't let the grass grow; indeed, the composer has his sights set on a return to Vienna ('I said I would go if someone will show me an autograph of Haydn') and the small matter of premiering his Second Violin Concerto with Anne-Sophie Mutter. On the piano he has an overture to finish for the 100th anniversary of the Hollywood Bowl, to be conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. But it's all in a day's work for John Williams. (6)

John Williams in Vienna is out now on DG in all formats, including vinyl and Blu-ray video

“ My responsibility is to ensure that anybody coming to King’s with any kind of belief will get something from it ”

THE BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

Daniel Hyde



A year into his post, King's College, Cambridge's new director of music talks to **James Naughtie** about the joys of singing and his plans for this year's Nine Lessons and Carols

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD CANNON

Surely there is nowhere better to be talking about the voices of boy choristers than in the chapel of King's College, Cambridge. It is a temple of their art. And even for a wider public which never ventures to evensong, the place is synonymous with the Anglican choral tradition as it has been passed down the generations.

I'm with Daniel Hyde, the inheritor of that legacy, and he's talking about how the sound of a choir can change, and how the search for a new blend of voices never ends. 'I'm interested in the idea that we might actually go for different sorts of sounds, depending on what repertoire we want.'

When he talked just before leaving St Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in New York, where he was director of music in a

place that takes its choir and its repertoire extremely seriously, there was a certain fluttering in the wings back in Cambridge. Did he want too much change at King's? The answer is no. And that's hardly surprising for someone who is embedded in the tradition – choir school in Durham, student at King's, an organ scholar in both Cambridge and Oxford, and close colleague of his celebrated predecessor at King's, the late Stephen Cleobury, who died last year soon after his retirement from a 37-year tenure with the choir. Hyde, just entering his forties, is as steeped in the modern story of the liturgical repertoire as anyone.

But nothing is static. We talk about that King's sound – the style that was largely the work of David Willcocks, with those famous vowels. A floating sound, as Hyde puts it. He alludes to the slighter rawer quality that Britten found so alluring and turned to dramatic effect. 'You know, it's a boys' culture. It's got grit. We know about the vocal technique and the way in which physiological changes come, and you can actually train a boy to sing and mix the head and the chest voices in such a way that you can have more resonance. You can ➤





have a richer colour. The idea of mixing those different sounds is exciting.'

'Colour' is a word that peppers the conversation. Part of the reason for thinking about flexibility in sound is that one inheritance from Stephen Cleobury is the encouragement of new writing for the liturgy. For the audience that looks forward each year to the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's, the newly commissioned carol has become a focus of interest (and, often, debate). In Hyde's mind, that's a template for deeper work with contemporary composers. By happy chance, his American experience is the perfect preparation.

'What are you trying to do? You're trying to mould a sound from multiple people singing the same parts. They all come from different parts of the country and speak to you. In their own ways. I found this in America, where of course they have some pretty flat vowels. In singing terms that can sound pretty flat in pitch, so you have to modify the vowels. That was quite an interesting experience for me. I didn't want to make them sound unnatural.'

'But there were African-American and Hispanic children in the choir, of course. I think we had maybe five different nationalities. Just think of the kinds of sounds that come out. For some of the kids, English was their second or third language. Doing the psalms with its fairly knotted text was interesting because the kids weren't coming from the sort of European Romance language tradition. Spanish was in many cases their second language, on top of Korean and Mandarin. But although the boys' approach to learning the language was different, it was very refreshing because it made me work. I could see them moulding the building blocks of the language. And then there was the nuance of how it actually sounded, especially while singing.' And then, the most difficult bit. 'At the same time, it all had to be natural for each individual so that they weren't shoehorned into some kind of straitjacket.'

So, choral singing brings discipline and individuality together. We spend as much time talking about broader education as we do about music – for Hyde, the joy of life in a choir school for the two-dozen boys who come each year is the release of energy

that musical discipline and the thrill of performance bring to the other parts of their lives (especially at age eight or nine).

The routine at King's – they're singing for the first time each day when most kids of their age haven't even thought of getting out of bed – has a rigour that brings quick and obvious benefits, not just to the choir but for each boy himself. 'It comes down to me having a sense of them all individually, and knowing which voices are going to blend and balance each other. You can actually change the sound of the choir just by changing the position of where two or three people stand because, of course, different voices have naturally

'It comes down to me having a sense of which voices are going to blend'

different colours. And sometimes those colours come off against each other. Sometimes they blend. To get the very best results of any kind of choir, you kind of have to get down into the weeds and know each boy you're working with.'

Hyde calls their daily routine 'monastic', but suggests that it has nothing but benefits. Languages, games and much more – music feeds into all of it. 'Their minds open up,' he says, 'and seeing these guys develop, you know that they've got it for life. Some of them may put it aside for a few years, but you can bet they will always remember their singing.' Ecclesiastical music-making is in Hyde's bones, but it's as much the buildings as the music that affects him, finding even the smell of them evocative. To prove it, he reels off some cathedrals and college chapels that he thinks he could identify simply by sniffing the air.

King's chapel, as we speak, is not only smelling fantastic, but it looks magnificent too, not least, because of COVID, most of



the chairs have been removed. The autumn light is streaming through the windows and the place suddenly seems to grow into a perfectly uncluttered space that is welcoming rather than confining. Naturally, although we've been trying to avoid spending our

time talking about the pandemic, the arrangements for Christmas are of interest. There will be a service; and there will be a congregation on Christmas Eve for the service that attracts a worldwide audience.

Conscious of the long time off school, Hyde has been getting the boys into their Christmas repertoire earlier than usual, to get their voices working smoothly again. The Nine Lessons and Carols may be their natural highlight of the year, but the daily services as well as the tours at home and abroad mean the choir demands discipline and reserves of energy that will test the



King of King's:
Hyde sits in the chapel
stalls; (left) in conversation
with James Naughtie

boys throughout the span when their voices haven't yet gone through the change.

Since his own time as a boy chorister, Hyde's commitment to that life hasn't been a matter of duty, but enthusiasm. But he's aware that it needs nourishment from those who aren't steeped in its ways to the same extent. Composers, for example. 'There are many composers who are very happy to come into the setting of a place of worship without necessarily having that back knowledge. Many of them write without religious convictions, but despite that, they can find in the text the emotive parts, the spiritual core. I don't count myself as a fully paid-up member of the Church but my responsibility is to ensure that anybody coming to King's with any kind of belief, whether composer or visitor, will get something from it.'

It's a fundamentally optimistic outlook that sees composers still drawn to a liturgical tradition even in a secular age, and Hyde believes that for a significant number of people the glories of the church choral story still shine bright. It's

one reason why he is convinced that the alarming shrinkage of music education in schools – with notable exceptions in both the state and private sectors – can be counterbalanced, to some small extent, by the evidence that, in general, choir schools are flourishing (despite the closure of the York Minster choir school which has recently provoked passionate debate).

Hyde is both a conservator of the tradition and an innovator. 'Stephen developed a way of coping with all this. In an interview a few Christmases ago, somebody suggested that whoever commissioned the carol by Harrison Birtwistle should be locked in a room and never let out! So you have to deal with those things, because all this is very much public property. I see my role as a guardian of what I believe to be the tradition. But traditions only exist if they are nurtured and develop their own life.'

And right now, with Christmas coming? 'Right now my job is to just get this thing out of the freezer – all these voices – and see what's there, and then just gradually piece the choir back together.' ☺



In the bleak midwinter:
King's College in
the early morning frost

An irregular Christmas

The chapel choir's plans for 2020

At the time of going to press, King's College was still working on the music lists for its Christmas services, naturally unsure to what extent it can host a congregation or even an ensemble in close proximity. With so much uncertainty, the sad decision has been made not to commission a new carol this year, breaking with an annual tradition that reaches back to 1983 when the then newly appointed director music music Stephen Cleobury signalled his wish to support and champion living composers.

We can, however, share details of some of the music that will feature at King's this Christmastide, including Imogen Holst's rarely performed 1965 carol *Make ye merry*, Bob Chilcott's atmospheric arrangement of the traditional German carol *Still, still, still* and another rarity, Elizabeth Poston's *As I sat on a sunny bank*. Taken from her 1968 collection *A garland gay*, Poston's carol received its world premiere on 26 January 1969, performed by the King's College Musical Society Choir under David Willcocks. Also in the mix is Roger Quilter's *An old carol*, a beautiful setting of the anonymous 15th-century poem *I sing of a maiden*; plus the *Shepherd's cradle* song arranged by early-20th-century organist Charles MacPherson.

For up-to-date details, see the Christmas edition of *Radio Times*.

Exclusive
carol written
for you!

A candle sings of simple things

Composer **Freya Waley-Cohen** introduces her beautiful new carol, specially commissioned for our readers by *BBC Music Magazine*

When I was little, every Christmas Eve we would go to a carolling party hosted by our neighbours. Along with other local families, we would crowd into their front room. On the table there would always be a miniature Santa sleigh filled with packets of smarties, and under the Christmas tree there would be a mountain of clementines. There on the tip of each branch of the tree would be a little red candle, lit with a real flame. When everyone had arrived and the front room was packed full, our host would bring out his accordion and the singing would begin.

Later when I was a teenager, I was part of the chamber choir at school. In the weeks leading up to the Christmas carol concert I mostly remember the evenings staying late with friends after school, sharing gossip and snacks before rehearsals. On the evening of the concert, all dressed in white, we would wait outside the church. We were each given a candle and as we stepped into the church one by one, in that moment of hushed anticipation, the candles were lit and the opening processional began. The carol concert would end the same way, and we would take our little lights out into the night.

To me, carolling is a kind of ritual that is about coming together during the long dark winter evenings and lighting them up with song. The togetherness is sacred, and it's hard to ignore how severely deficient in togetherness this year has been.

All things considered, writing this carol for this year's Christmas was definitely an act of reckless optimism.



Shining a light:
Freya Waley-Cohen

Carolling is about coming together and lighting up the winter evenings with song

The lyrics to *A candle sings of simple things* were written by my friend Charlie Cotton. When I rang him, I asked if he knew of any old Christmas poems. He didn't suggest anything, but we talked about Christmas and traditions and what writing a carol right now felt like. The next day I received a generous email from him, full of words for me to set to music.

Performance notes

A candle sings of simple things starts with a simple melody that should sound natural and open-hearted. There are no dynamics marked for the opening or for the verses, so whatever feels most natural to you is the right way to sing it. When you get to the chorus, 'O behold be held' (bar 14), go ahead and belt it out, like you're out in the streets or the town square calling everyone to join you — until the *piano* at bar 22 where the altos and tenors suddenly highlight the tenderness of the words.

When you get to bars 24-27 you'll notice there are three optional solos in the sopranos, tenors and basses. If your choir has a singer in each of these parts who would enjoy a solo moment, then these bars are for them. If not, then really make sure you exaggerate the hushed *piano* marking here. The canon that takes you from here until bar 43 is one big build-up.

The final phrase doesn't have any dynamic marking, just like the opening. However you choose to shape it — loud and bold, or gently beguiling — this phrase should feel like an invitation. ☺

We do hope that 'A candle sings of simple things' will eventually find its way into your services and carol concerts — if not this year, then perhaps the next. Please feel free to photocopy the music or download the PDF from classical-music.com — and do share it. If, by some happy chance, you get the chance to perform it with your fellow singers, do let us know at music@classical-music.com.

for the readers of BBC Music Magazine

A candle sings of simple things

Charlie Cotton

Freya Waley-Cohen

Simply, and with joy $\text{♩} = 100$

a—can-dle sings of sim - ple things,

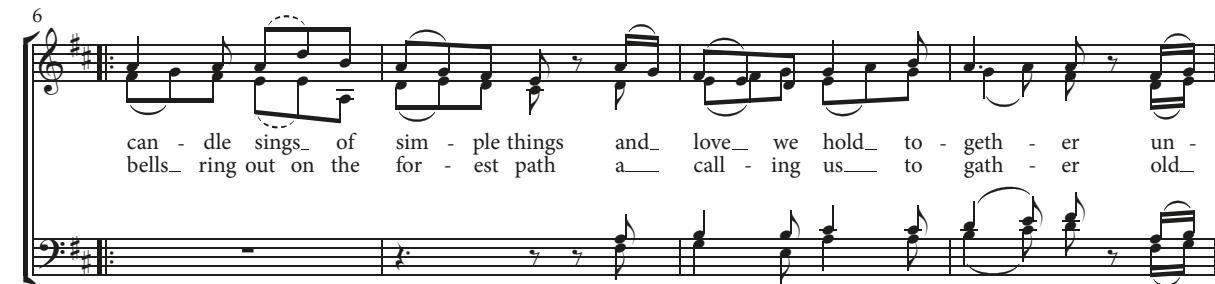


SOPRANO
ALTO

TENOR
BASS

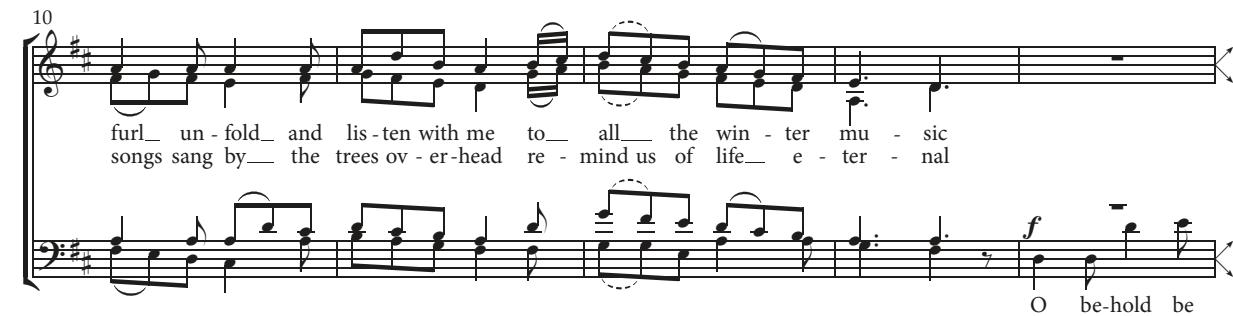
la la la

of—sim - ple things,



6

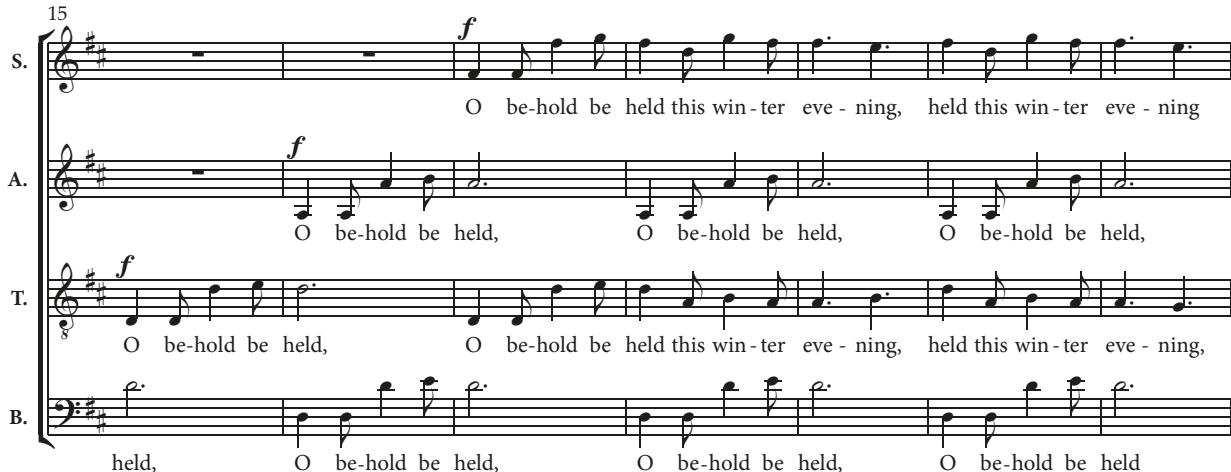
can - dle sings_ of sim - ple things_ and_ love_ we hold_ to - geth - er un -
bells_ ring out on the for - est path a_ call - ing us_ to gath - er old -



10

furl_ un - fold_ and lis - ten with me to_ all_ the win - ter mu - sic
songs sang by_ the trees ov - er-head re - mind us of life_ e - ter - nal

O be-hold be



15

O be-hold be held this win - ter eve - ning, held this win - ter eve - ning

O be-hold be held, O be-hold be held, O be-hold be held,

O be-hold be held, O be-hold be held this win - ter eve - ning, held this win - ter eve - ning,

held, O be-hold be held, O be-hold be held, O be-hold be held

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Readers' carol

1. 2. (optional solo) *poco a poco cresc.*

22 the a—can-dle sings of sim-ple things, a—can-dle sings of
p held this win-ter eve-ning, the eve-ning
p held this win-ter eve-ning eve-ning (optional solo) *p* a—can-dle
p (optional solo) *p* a—can-dle sings of sim-ple things,
p (tutti) *mp* *poco a poco cresc.* *mf*
 sim-ple things, a—can-dle sings of sim-ple things, of sim-ple things, sings of,
mp *poco a poco cresc.* *mf*
 a—can-dle sings of sim-ple things of sim-ple, things of sim-ple,
poco a poco cresc. (tutti) *mp* *poco a poco cresc.* *mf*
 sings of sim-ple things, a—can-dle sings of sim-ple things, of sim-ple things, of
 (tutti) *mf* *poco a poco cresc.*
 a—can-dle sings of sim-ple, sings of sim-ple,

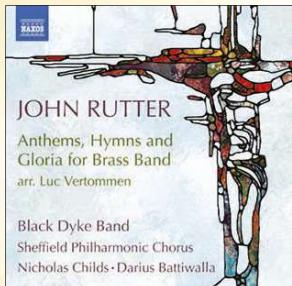
33 *f*

S. A. sings of sim-ple, sings of sim-ple, sings of sim-ple, sings of sim-ple, sings of sim-ple things—
 T. B. *f*

so—come gath - er here round the light to - night.

39 so—come gath - er here round the light to - night.

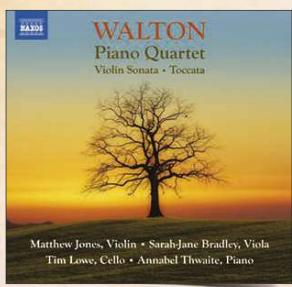
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HEAVEN FULL OF STARS

Vasari Singers, Jeremy Backhouse

An attractive and accessible programme of contemporary choral music, *Heaven full of Stars* celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Vasari Singers. The themes of stars, heaven and celestial light are explored through music by Bob Chilcott, Eric Whitacre, Cecilia McDowall, Gabriel Jackson, Roxanna Panufnik, Ēriks Ešenvalds, Judith Weir, John Rutter and many more. 'We hope that this lovely music depicting light in the darkness will prove a musical beacon to all its listeners.'

– Jeremy Backhouse

WILLIAM WALTON

Piano Quartet, Violin Sonata, Toccata
Matthew Jones, Sarah-Jane Bradley,
Tim Lowe, Annabel Thwaite

These four works represent all of Sir William Walton's chamber music involving both violin and piano. They offer a fascinating glimpse of Walton's stylistic journey, from the youthful exuberance of the early *Piano Quartet* and the *Toccata* to the unconventional but masterful *Violin Sonata*, and the *Two Pieces* with their connection to his music for films.

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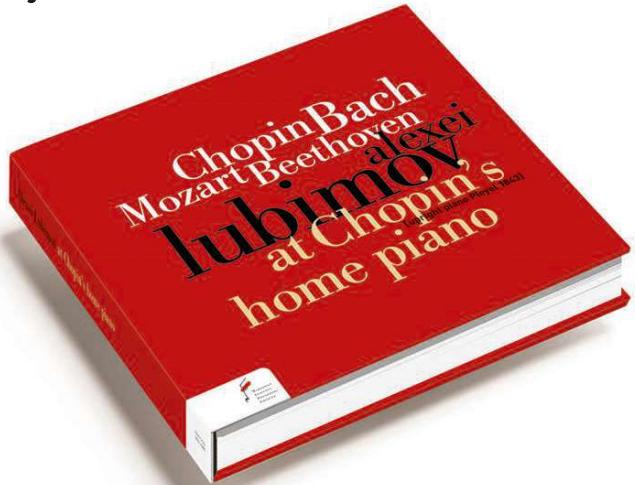
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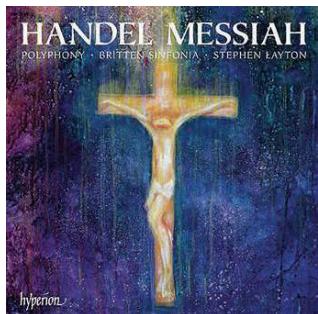
A musical ADVENT Calendar

We suggest 24 melodious ways to get you in the mood for Christmas

For most people, 2020 hasn't been a great deal of fun, nor should we pretend this Christmas is likely to be normal. But that doesn't mean that it has to be a complete write-off. For music fans there are still ways to enjoy the season, by heading online, listening to the radio, browsing through their record collections or, as we shall see, by various other tuneful frolics and fun. We have put our heads together – in a socially distanced way – to present an Advent calendar of ideas, one for every day until 25 December itself...

1 Plan your Radio 3 listening

Start the month by looking forward. Even if you're unable to hear live music in person, there's plenty to enjoy via the airwaves over the next few weeks. For instance, on 16 December, Bob Chilcott and John Rutter bring seasonal sparkle as they lead the BBC Singers in a selection of their own festive choral works; or, on 20 December, you may want to race across the continent for concerts from Reykjavík, Barcelona and more. Now stir in some joyful Beethoven and a bracing festive walk with Horatio Clare, and the month starts to look a lot



more promising. Head to p101 for the bigger picture.

2 Enjoy Handel's *Messiah*

No Christmas period should be allowed to pass without at least one airing of Handel's *Messiah*. Though this most famous of all oratorios covers more than just the festive period, and was in fact first performed not in December but in

April, it has nonetheless become an essential part of our seasonal listening. There are all manner of recordings to explore, from Thomas Beecham's whistles-and-bells extravaganza of 1959 to pared-down period-instrument versions with just a handful of performers. Our own *Building a Library* choice, back in 2013, was by Polyphony and the Britten Sinfonia under conductor Stephen Layton. It was described by reviewer Berta Joncus as a recording that 'brings an unparalleled freshness to this familiar work, combining power with a delicacy faithful to Handel's Baroque sensibility'.

3 Help the homeless

Shelter, the housing and homelessness charity, is aiming to host the year's best attended virtual carol concert. Taking place today at St-Martin-

1



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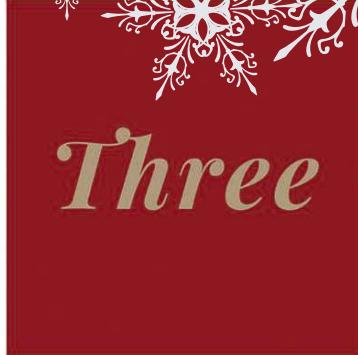


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Three



4



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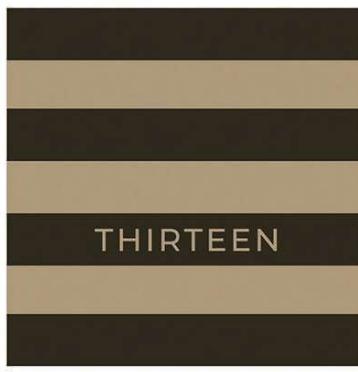
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15



SEVENTEEN



19



20



22



24



25

Christmas

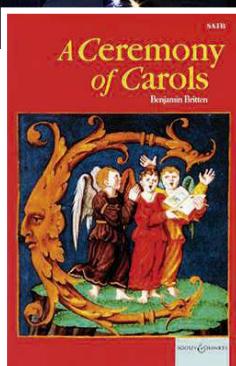


Sparkling performance: I Fagiolini sings at the Live from London – Christmas festival; (right) Britten's birthplace in Suffolk; (far right) some suggested festive listening

in-the-Fields Church at 7pm, the 45-minute concert can be streamed for free, with online attendees invited to contribute to the cause as they wish. To register, head to www.shelter.org.uk/carols, where you will also receive a welcome pack to help make the evening even more meaningful.

4 Take a look back...to 1943

4 Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* came into being in the least likely circumstances, composed not in the depths of a chilly winter but while Britten and Peter Pears were heading across the Atlantic on a Swedish cargo ship in early spring, 1942. On 5 December that same year, the women of the Fleet Street Choir gave the work its first outing in the Library of Norwich Castle, but Britten was not finished with it yet. Over the next few months, he added another carol, 'That yongē child', to the set, plus a harp interlude and a plainchant



'Procession' and 'Recession' at the beginning and end. And it was in that completed form that the Morriston Boys' Choir performed the *Ceremony* at London's Wigmore Hall on 4 December 1943, recording it soon after. '[The carols] have had a series of thrilling shows by a choir of little Welsh boys (from a school in the poorest part of Swansea) and a great Russian harpist, Maria Korchinska,' wrote Britten in a letter. 'This has meant many journeys to Wales to rehearse, & then they all (35!) came up to town & sang the piece many times.'

5 Attend a festival

5 Running from 1 Dec to 6 Jan, the VOCES8 Foundation's Live from London – Christmas festival has gathered together an impressive line-up: violinist Rachel Podger, baritone Roderick Williams and ensembles including I Fagiolini, the London Adventist Chorale and Gabrieli

Consort & Players are among those taking part. Today's concert sees the VOCES8 choir itself perform six new works, joined for the occasion by US choir The Aeolians. To buy your online ticket, either for a single concert or for the season, go to voces8.foundation/livefromlondon-christmas

6 Visit a composer's birthplace

6 Presuming it's not raining, shake off the cobwebs and head outdoors – not least because famous-house hunting is an activity that can be carried out in a suitably socially distanced way. The birthplaces and childhood homes of many composers in the UK are proudly marked either by a simple plaque or sometimes by something more elaborate. Set the satnav and off you go. Here are a few of our favourites:

Benjamin Britten 21 Kirkley Cliff Road, Lowestoft NR33 0DB

Hubert Parry 2 Richmond Terrace, Bournemouth BH2 6HE

William Walton 93 Werneth Hall Road, Oldham OL8 4BA



Morfydd Owen 68 Park Street, Treforest,
Pontypridd CF37 1SN

Herbert Howells 41 High Street, Lydney,
Glos GL15 5DD

John Ireland Inglewood, St Margaret's
Road, Altrincham WA14 2AP

Gustav Holst 4 Clarence Road, Cheltenham
GL52 2AY

George Butterworth 5 Driffield Terrace,
York YO24 1EF

Eric Coates 182 Beardall Street, Hucknall,
Notts NG15 7HA

7 Share a favourite disc

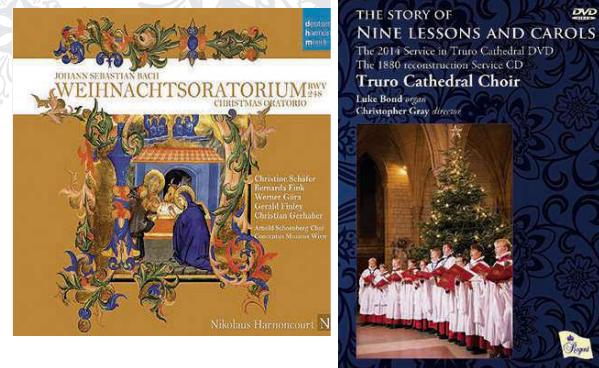
As regular readers of *Music To My Ears* (see p22) will know, we love nothing more than to share our current listening; or, even better, to find out what others can recommend to us. So what do leading names from the music world like to put on at Christmas? Here are three suggestions...

Bob Chilcott (composer)

As tempted as I was to go for Michael Bublé's *Christmas* (a brilliant album), I decided to choose Nikolaus Harnoncourt's recording of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Arnold Schoenberg Choir and Concentus Musicus Wien. It's electric, joyous, so deeply human, and it dances with life. It makes the past and the present resonate together and reminds me why I love music and this time of year so much.

Alexandra Dariescu (pianist)

Throughout my childhood, I used to sing in the church choir with my mum and grandparents. Around Christmas, we would



go into care homes and hospitals singing carols to bring a bit of comfort and joy. We would also listen and sing along when baking cakes and cookies. I would like to invite you on a gorgeous Romanian carolling journey: Angela Gheorghiu joins the Romanian Radio Orchestra in *Colinde românești*, which will bring you bundles of joyous tradition.

Petroc Trelawny (Radio 3 presenter)

I never really liked Wham's 'Last Christmas' until a friend introduced me to the performance by Natalia Ushakova, Vesselina Kasarova and others filmed live in Vienna in 2014. Once seen, never forgotten. But the disc I listen to every Christmas is Truro Cathedral Choir's reconstruction of its 1880 Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. Today, King's College, Cambridge gets the glory for this annual treat, but it was in Victorian Cornwall that the service was invented.

8 Open a bottle, with music

Treat yourself to a favourite tipple, accompanied by a much-loved piece. Three years ago, the *BBC Music Magazine* team spent a happy afternoon matching up music and beverages, assisted by advice from wine guru Oz Clarke. For instance, we suggest that a Douro Valley Reserva Quinta da Rosa (left) – described by Oz as 'scented with violets and lily sap, streaked with scintillating cranberry brilliance, and bursting out with the chewy richness of raspberries and red cherries' – would go well with Grieg's *Sechs Lieder*; or that a Stellenrust Barrel Fermented Chenin Blanc – 'mouth-watering white peach and nectarine, squeezed with lemon, rubbed with hazelnut and smeared with cream' – would taste even better if accompanied by Biber's G minor Passacaglia. We're sure, though, you'll enjoy finding your own perfect partners. Cheers!



9 Sing a BBC Music carol

It was in 2014 that we first had the idea of commissioning a composer to write a new carol which we could then print in our Christmas issue for readers to sing. That composer was Thomas Hewitt Jones, and his haunting *Lullay, My Liking* was the result. 'I got a lot of interest in it when I wrote it, and a lot of groups performed it,' he remembers. 'And then, once they have the music from the magazine, they can perform it in later years, so it runs and runs. It's helped put my carols on the map.' Since then, further carols have followed from Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Alexander L'Estrange, Toby Young, Dobrinka Tabakova, Owain Park and, this year, Freya Waley-Cohen (see p36) – all can be found on our website. 'I've got to know a couple of the other composers well, and we're all proud to have had a carol in the magazine,' says Hewitt Jones. 'I'm so glad the idea has taken off in such a good way.'

10 Head back to the 1500s

To escape the grimness of the present day, a visit to Renaissance Europe is called for. For all the charms of *Away in a manger*, *Silent Night* and all, some of the most accomplished Christmas music was composed by the likes of Tallis, Byrd and Victoria nearly 500 years ago, and much of it can be heard in equally fine performances by choirs specialising in this repertoire. The Sixteen's *A Renaissance Christmas* is a good place to start, as is the Tallis Scholars' *The Tallis Christmas Mass*.

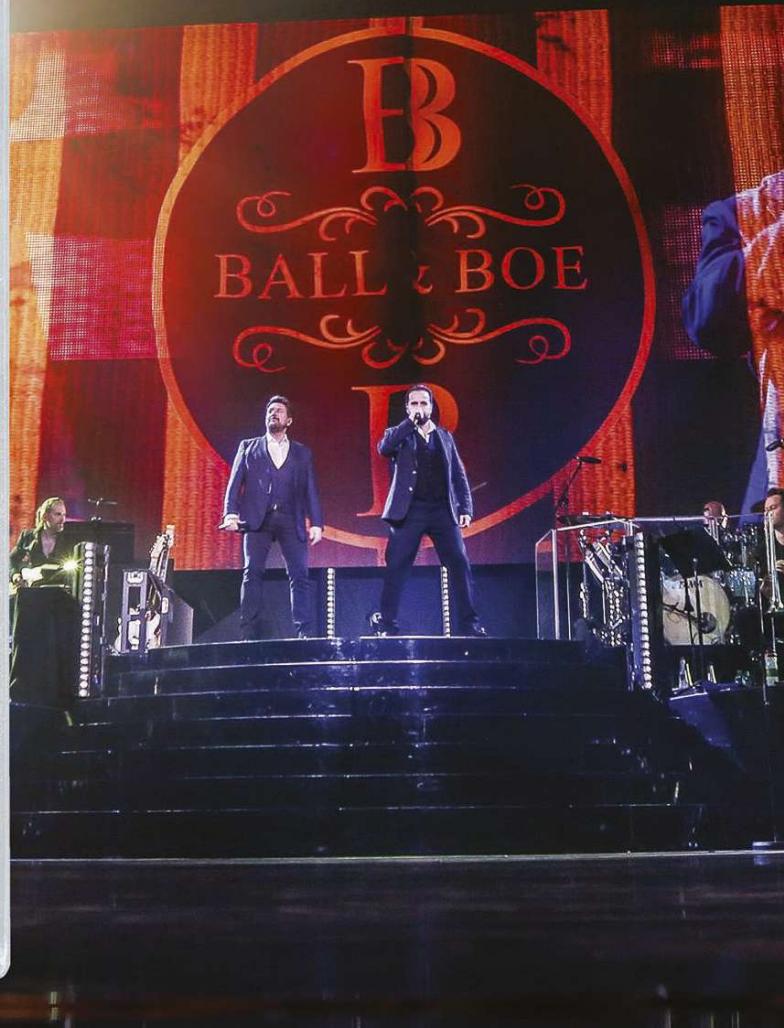
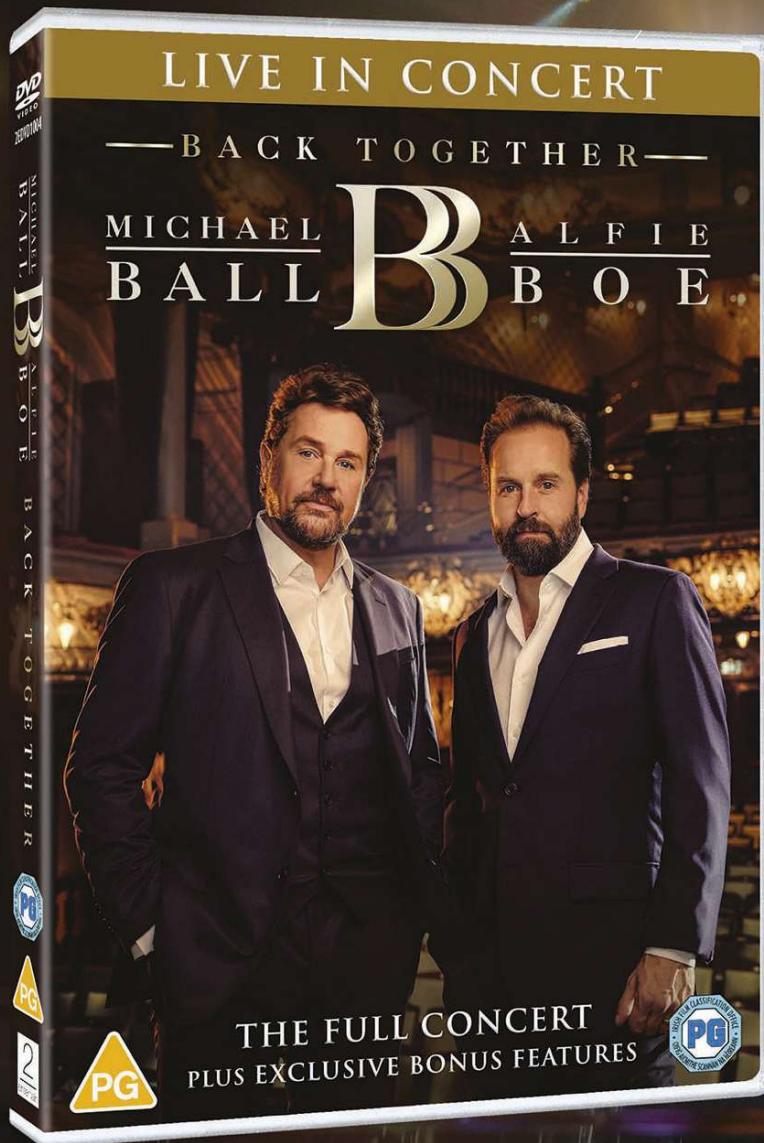
11 Cook Tournedos Rossini

To make this famous music-inspired dish, we have asked Jennifer Johnston – mezzo-soprano, foodie and creator of the *Notes from Musicians' Kitchens* website – to lead the way:

'Tournedos Rossini is a rich French steak dish,' she explains. 'It's named after the composer Rossini, famed for his

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gastronomic excesses. Traditionally it comprises a filet mignon (a beef tournedos) pan-fried in butter, served on a large toasted crouton, topped with a slice of pan-fried foie-gras, garnished with slices of black truffle and finished with a madeira demi-glace sauce. I'm uncomfortable with foie-gras, not least for the animal welfare questions it raises, so I use a duck pâté instead. It is an assembled dish, so the key is not over-estimating the time it takes to cook either the steak or toast. Make the madeira demi-glace first, fry the steak and foie-gras (or spread the pâté on the top of the cooked steak), stacking them on top of the brioche toast. Pour the madeira demi-glace over the stack and serve immediately.'

1kg fillet steak, pan-fried in 100g of butter, to taste (my preference is medium), cut into 4 equal pieces
4 slices of brioche bread, pan-toasted or grilled
4 slices of foie-gras, or 300g of duck pâté
Grated fresh black truffle
Sea salt
Ground black pepper

For the madeira demi-glace:
30g of shallots, chopped
50g of butter
125ml of madeira
1l beef stock
1 sprig of thyme
1 bay leaf
Sea salt (pinch)
Ground black pepper

In a heavy-based saucepan, fry the shallots in the butter until soft. Add the madeira, thyme, bay leaf and salt and pepper and

gently simmer until the shallots are coated in a syrup. Pour in the stock and simmer until reduced by half and shiny.

For more recipes, with all funds going to the Help Musicians charity, go to notesfrommusicianskitchens.com

12 Name the elves

The four composers pictured above appear to be in very good elf! But can you say who they are? Answers on p13.

13 Worship on the Isle of Man

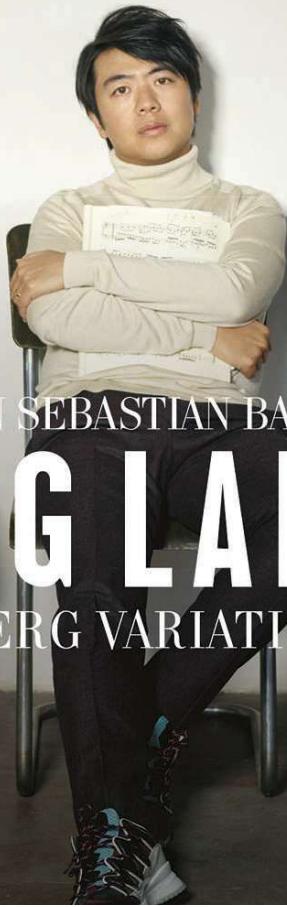
While most of the British Isles have become accustomed to the dispiriting sight of an upward curve on the Cases of Coronavirus graph since the beginning of autumn, the story on the Isle of Man

has been a little different. Being able to shut itself off from visitors has meant that the island has been fairly COVID-free since early summer. Choral services at Cathedral Isle of Man were able to resume on 28 June and, as its organist and director of music Peter Litman tells us, for him the pandemic has even proved useful. 'Our choir consists of 15 trebles and around 12 voluntary adult singers,' he says. 'The situation in the UK has had huge advantages on the choir through the lockdown period, with choristers from Durham and Truro cathedrals returning to sing at their "home" cathedral and, temporarily, choral scholars from Sheffield University, King's College, London and even a baritone choral scholar from



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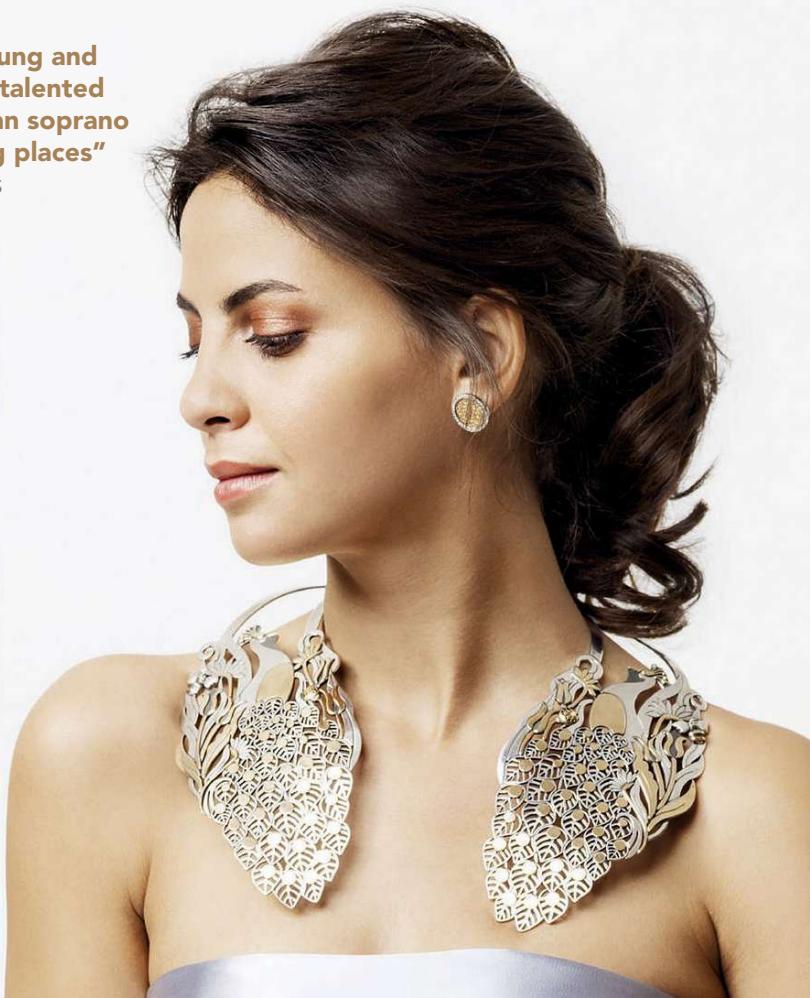


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Island of song: (left) Cathedral Isle of Man will host a carol service with full congregation; (below) the King's Singers' popular *Christmas* album; (bottom) having a ball with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

King's College, Cambridge returning to sing with the choir! Cathedral Isle of Man's Nine Lessons and Carols service on 13 December will be in-person, with no facemasks or restrictions on singing. To livestream it, go to www.cathedral.im

14 Share and share alike

When we asked six musical figures to tell us about their favourite Christmas disc (see also 7 Dec), little did we expect three of them to choose the same one. A case of 'We three King's Singers fans'...

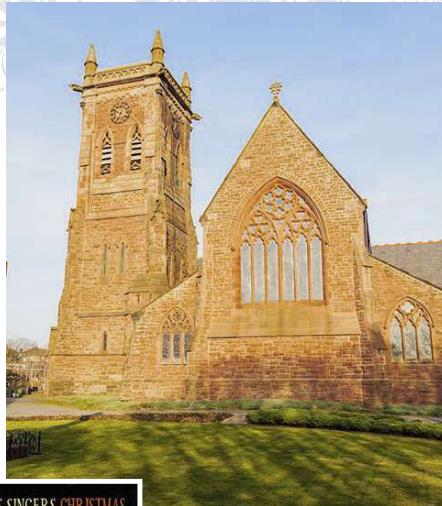
Carolyn Sampson (soprano)

I have a soft spot for Ella Fitzgerald's *Swinging Christmas*, and Ex Cathedra's *Sir Christèmas* album always makes an appearance. But when I spend Christmas with my German family, the celebration begins around the Nativity Scene with a reading of the Christmas story, then a little bell rings... the Christkind has been! We go to the tree, which is candlelit. Standing around it, we listen to a recording of The King's Singers singing *Stille Nacht*. It's beautiful. So, my album would have to be their 2003 disc, *Christmas*.

Eric Whitacre (composer)

My family has a handful of albums that are on endless repeat over Christmas: Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole and Loretta Lynn. This music simply is the sound of the holidays. But putting the great recordings of *Messiah* or *Christmas Oratorio* to one side, when I want that pure dream of Christmas, I listen to The King's Singers' *Christmas* – 24 carols, one for each day of Advent (including Philip Lawson's beautiful *Lullay My Liking*), plus a bonus track that pays homage to a King's Singers standard.

Sarah Walker (Radio 3 presenter) The King's Singers' *Christmas* is my favourite festive album. It takes the listener on a seasonal musical journey, calling in at nations far and wide, mixing up traditional carols with sacred songs both ancient and modern. But the real Christmas spirit lies in the voices themselves, blending with such richness and colour. I also find it very moving – and not at all camp – to hear six grown men singing *Away in a manger* with such tenderness!



15 Munch Mozart

Why not prepare yourself for the inevitable chocolate onrush with a little pre-emptive training? Mozart balls – or *Mozartkugeln*, to give them their correct German name – were invented by the Salzburg confectioner Paul Fürst in 1890 and consist of a marzipan centre surrounded by layers of nougat and chocolate. Disputes over rights to manufacture them mean that, today, only Mozart balls made by Mirabell are allowed to be spherical. Others have flat bottoms, but they all taste good.

16 Tell a musical cracker joke

Put on a paper hat and amuse everyone. Here are four of our favourites...

Q: Why was the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic first off the plane?

A: Because he only had Karajan luggage!

Q: Why did the woodwind player go fishing? **A:** He wanted to catch a bass soon!

Q: What do you get if you drop a piano down a mineshaft? **A:** A flat miner!

Q: Why did Beethoven refuse to compose any quavers or minims?

A: He was feeling crotchety!

17 Take a look back... to 1770

Everyone's grand plans for celebrating the 250th anniversary year of Beethoven's birth have been almost entirely ruined



by coronavirus, so all the more reason for raising a glass on the big day itself. That said, we don't know for sure when that day actually was. Records reveal the composer's baptism as having taken place on 17 December 1770, and at the time it was usual practice to do this around 24 hours after the birth... but nothing should be presumed. Whatever the correct day, to mark the occasion in an apposite way, let's turn the clock forward from his birthday to 56 years and three months later, when Beethoven was on his death bed. The story goes that, as his health deteriorated, he had ordered a case of Riesling wine from the Rhine village of Rüdesheim... but, alas, it arrived too late for him to drink it. 'Schade', as they say in Germany. The better news, though, is that Rüdesheimer Rieslings are still in good health and widely available. Now where's the corkscrew? We think we may have left it behind on p43.

18 Hear a brand new carol

In September, composers were invited to enter the Radio 3 Carol Competition 2020. The brief? To write a singable melody that sets Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem *Christmas Carol* in the musical style of one's choice. An eight-man judging panel including bass-baritone Bryn Terfel, singer and presenter Clare Teal and conductor and composer Ken Burton (see p22) has been poring over the entries, and now it's time for their decision to be revealed. Tune in to *Breakfast on Radio 3* (6.30–9.00am) to hear the winner.

19 Invite Scrooge to join you

Given the popularity of the novel itself, it is surprising that *A Christmas Carol* has largely failed to ignite the imagination of composers. One exception was Vaughan Williams, whose 1926 ballet

On Christmas Night is based loosely on Dickens's tale, first published on this day in 1843. With our Ebeneezer Scrooge hat (or, rather, nightcap) on, we might bah-humbugly suggest that it's not Vaughan Williams at his brilliant best; however, our Bob Cratchit side tells us to lighten up and enjoy the City of London Sinfonia and Richard Hickox's 2005 recording of it (Chandos CHAN10385). It's good fun. ➤



20 Stream a carol service

The last Sunday before Christmas is traditionally the day when many cathedrals and churches hold their main carol services – for most of us, however, heading over to our local place of worship this year is looking unlikely. That said, services will still be taking place across the UK and beyond, and made available to stream online. For details of such events, both for today and throughout the season, head to our website at classical-music.com/carolservicelivestreams.

21 Take a look back... to 1916

Among all the usual exultations of joy and atmospheric scene setting, one carol by Debussy strikes a very different chord. Written amid the misery of World War I, the French composer's *Carol of the Homeless Children* depicts the sorrow of those affected by the conflict, with words penned by Debussy himself: 'Our houses are gone! The enemy has taken everything, even our little beds! They burned the school and the schoolmaster. They burned the church and the Lord Jesus! And the poor old man who couldn't get away!' Debussy was himself very unwell at the time and soon after completing it in early-December 1915 was admitted to hospital for treatment for cancer. There are no records of the carol having been sung that year, so the performance on 21 December

1916 by soprano Jane Bathori with the composer himself at the piano may well have been the first. It was also to be one of Debussy's last ever public appearances on stage.

22 Play a glass harmonica

When inventor Benjamin Franklin visited London in the 1750s, he was amused by a fad for playing tunes on half-filled wine-glasses – so much so, in fact, that he went on to invent the 'glass armonica', an instrument that replicated the effect using a range of glass bowls set in a wooden case. Forget Franklin for now, and instead make your own version of the original inspiration. We advise taking 12 wine glasses, one for each semi-tone of the scale, and tune each by filling it with water until you reach the right pitch. The glasses are played by dipping a finger into the water and gently running it around the rims. If all goes well, a pleasing hum should be heard. If not, abandon the idea and fill the glasses with wine instead.

23 Get festive with Felix

In 1843, Felix Mendelssohn took up the post of Generalmusikdirektor in Berlin, where most of his extended family joined him for Christmas. Being a dutiful older brother, he didn't forget to write to his sister Rebecka, who was in Italy:

Crystal clear: (left) the trebles of King's College, Cambridge Choir; (below) Claude Debussy, the composer of a distinctly sombre carol

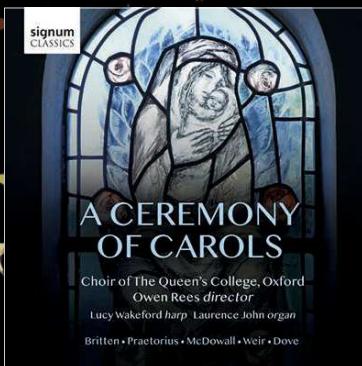
'Today is the eve of Christmas Eve, and I will spend it in talking to you, my dear little sister. Our purchases are made, and the arrangements completed. The pair of little pictures which I have been too busy to finish cannot be touched by candlelight, so this is the time for a chat. If only I could have one with you in reality! Christmas Eve is to be kept at our home. The candles are just being put into the chandeliers in the blue room, where the Christmas tree is to stand tomorrow. The double window is now in the middle, and I am going to give Cécile tomorrow 16 plants, big and little, to stand in it. My other presents will be – for her, a black satin dress, a bonnet, a few trifles, and one of my well known, much too green landscapes, on pressed carton-paper; for Paul a landscape from Sachse (the picture-dealer), which he has a special longing for; for Fanny, a table cover for the blue room; for Hensel an immense ham and some claret; for Sebastian, a study-lamp; for the children, a set of small furniture (they have been wishing for furniture), etc. [...] On Christmas Day I have for the first time to conduct the music in the cathedral with orchestra; there is to be a new psalm of mine, "To our Salvation" from Handel's *Messiah*, a couple more new trifles of mine, and some chorales with trombone. On New Year's Day it will be much the same. [...] I must say between ourselves that so far I do not expect much from it, but do not tell anybody!'

From The Mendelssohn Family 1729-1847 – From Letters and Journals; Ed. Sebastian Hensel; Hamlin Press

24 Hear carols from King's

Now in its 102nd year, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge will be led by its director of music Daniel Hyde (see p32). As is tradition, the Christmas Eve service will open with 'Once in Royal David's City', and the service will be broadcast as usual on BBC Four at 3pm. If you miss it – or want to listen again, it'll be played again on Radio 3 on Christmas Day at 1pm. Sit back, relax (if you can) and, in the words of Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra and all, have yourself a merry little Christmas. ☺

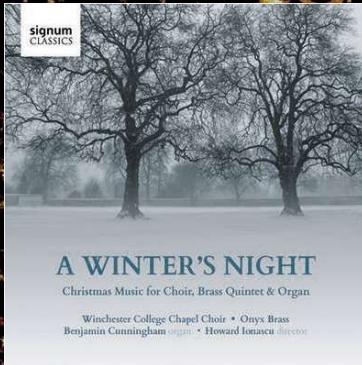




A CEREMONY OF CAROLS

Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford
Owen Rees director
Lucy Wakeford harp Laurence John organ
Britten • Praetorius • McDowell • Weir • Dove

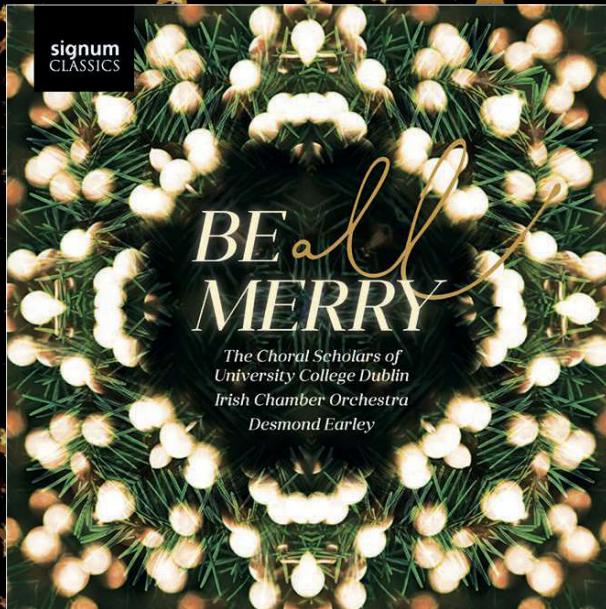
SIGCD627



A WINTER'S NIGHT

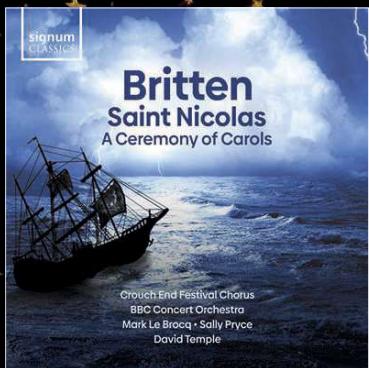
Christmas Music for Choir, Brass Quintet & Organ
Winchester College Chapel Choir • Ooys Bras
Benjamin Cunningham organ • Howard Ionascu director

SIGCD646

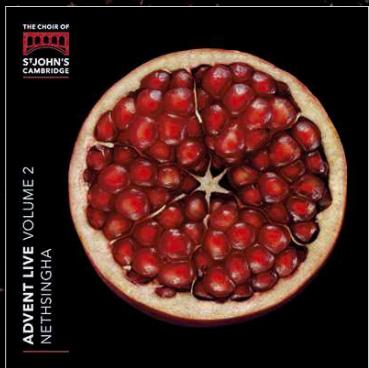


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I have a song to sing, O!

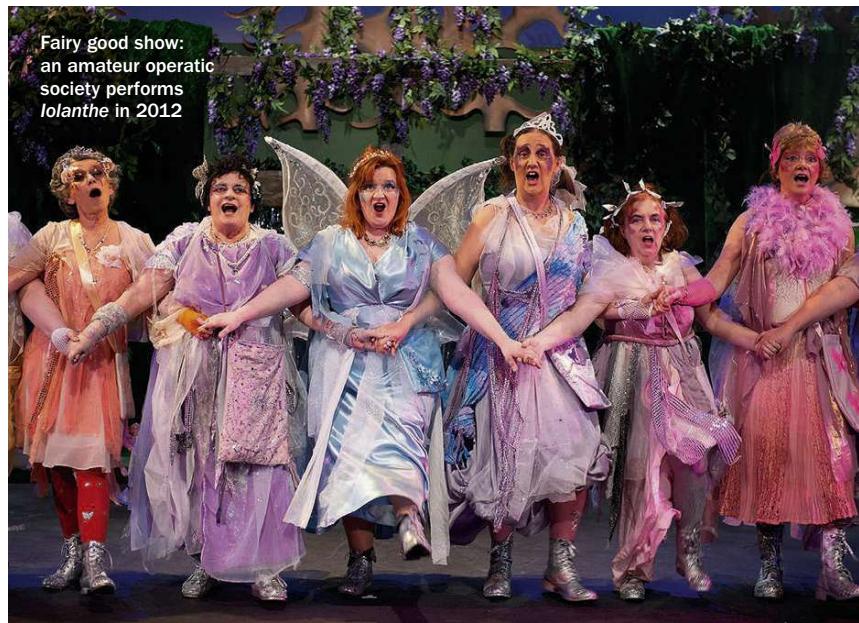
Why are the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan so beloved by amateur dramatics? G&S veteran **Daniel Jaffé** explains their brilliance, as well as the joy of performing them alongside like-minded friends



The more time passes in this period of social distancing, the more fanciful it seems. Just over five years ago, I started taking part in Gilbert and Sullivan shows with a range of enthusiasts, from lawyers and civil servants to cabbies and builders. Rehearsals might be in a church or school assembly hall, or sometimes in somebody's ample (but never quite big enough) front room. After a couple of months of rehearsal came the exciting day when we tried on our costumes – a moment when you suddenly saw your character fully take physical form. Then came 'show week', involving technical and dress

rehearsals in the theatre, followed by actual performances: the unforgettable sensation of steeling oneself in the wings before making an entrance; or the camaraderie as performers backstage watched their on-stage colleagues through the CCTV, assessing whether it was a 'good' audience from the laughter and applause.

All this abruptly stopped in March with COVID. While amateur societies across the country wait for the 'all clear', several have been holding virtual social meetings via Zoom. What Zoom can't provide, of course, is a space to rehearse and perform, the very activities which first brought us together – and which for



some were virtually a lifeline. No matter that every G&S show is different, depending on the operetta involved and the director's take on it: each production is carefully rehearsed and, in its final form, predictable to its participants. In those conditions, several shy individuals may blossom, even become extrovert, as their talent for performing and singing is given a 'safe space' to fulfil its potential. One of our company, in his early thirties, is awkward in everyday life, yet is transformed both in rehearsal and on stage where he can exercise his fine tenor voice and excellent abilities as a comic actor.

The pleasure of rehearsing and performing greatly depends on both the music director (usually in charge of the earliest rehearsals) and the stage director. As it happens, my kickstart as an amateur G&S performer was fortunate. For one, the musical standard of the first company I joined was exceptionally high, thanks to its music director Elinor Corp. By profession a music teacher, Eli managed her chorus and principals with a friendly but firm manner, aided by her total grasp of the music she was conducting, for which she made it clear she had tremendous respect. For Eli, its innate dramatic pacing and masterly characterisation made a lot of mannerisms practised by certain 'seasoned' G&S amateurs (or even pros) quite unnecessary.

With her was a highly intelligent and sometimes quite brilliant stage director who really made his principals work hard and be aware and in control of what they were doing – even down to facial expression (a year or so later I was spending many an evening gurning in front of a mirror to discover how to look terrified rather than 'shifty' when playing Sergeant of Police in *The Pirates of Penzance*).

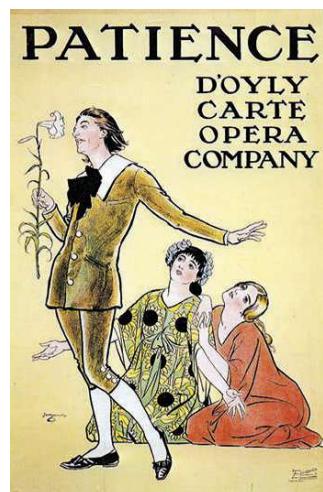
The wonderful world of G&S: (opposite, top) our own Daniel Jaffé plays Sir Roderic in a production of *Ruddigore*; (opposite, bottom) a *Patience*-themed caricature of Gilbert and Sullivan, 1881; (below) Stewie in *Family Guy* brandishes his *Mikado*-inspired 'Little List'



Alongside the many fine and talented amateur singer-actors I have performed with have been several singing students and budding professionals. One of them was hired to play a youthful lead tenor role uncast after auditions; but more often, students from various local music colleges and academies eagerly audition with local G&S societies to gain valuable stage experience and perform roles they could add to their CV. Their participation is, of course, mutually beneficial, as they not only add 'pep' to the cast, but they also inspire amateurs (including myself) to raise their game and hone their own skills.

But why Gilbert and Sullivan? Though their heyday was in the 1870s and '80s, the shows are still performed with relish all around the English-speaking world and beyond; their songs are referenced in popular TV shows (most frequently in *Family Guy* – try Stewie's version of the 'Little List' song), and sung by lead characters in blockbuster cinema franchises such as Star Trek (Jean-Luc Picard in *Insurrection*) and Indiana Jones (Sallah in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). The songs featured do tend to offer just one side of G&S – the tub-thumping patriotism of 'A British Tar' and 'For he is an Englishman' (both from *HMS Pinafore*), and the wry patter songs of the 'Little List' (from *Mikado*) and of the Major-General in *Pirates*; but at least they showcase something of Gilbert's verbal dexterity and wit, and Sullivan's ability to write a memorably stirring tune.

But there is a great deal more to Sullivan than those sturdy anthems and patter songs. I have just revisited a well-loved recording from my childhood: soprano Cynthia Glover singing 'Poor wand'ring one', Mabel's first aria in *Pirates*. On the face of it, it is simply Mabel's admonishment to her sisters for not taking pity on the pirate Frederic, who wishes to renounce his profession and find love. But as much as Glover's artistry, it's the touching sentiment



Students from various local music colleges and academies eagerly audition with local G&S societies to gain valuable stage experience



Three little maids:
Sybil Gordon (centre),
played by Alice Krige,
sings in *The Mikado*, in
Chariots of Fire, 1981

I am the very model of a modern major G&S fan

Some of Gilbert and Sullivan's more unexpected enthusiasts



Gustav Holst

When the future composer of *The Planets* was born, Gilbert and Sullivan were yet to compose *Trial by Jury*.

The young Gustav became a fan, and his G&S-inspired *Lansdown Castle* was his first public success. His mature comic opera, *The Perfect Fool*, shows several G&S traits, including the surreal humour of their last two works, *Utopia, Limited* and *The Grand Duke*.



Harold Abrahams

Winner of the 100m at the Paris Olympics in 1924, sprinter Harold Abrahams was a major G&S nut, as

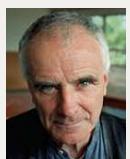
is celebrated in *Chariots of Fire*. However, the 1981 film gets the wrong Sybil – Abrahams was engaged not to leading G&S mezzo Sybil Gordon as it portrays (above), but to Sybil Evers, who sang smaller roles with the D'Oyly Carte company.



Serge Diaghilev and Igor Stravinsky

While in London, the impresario of the Ballets Russes and his star composer, by

Stravinsky's own account, would often 'steal off together to *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Patience*, *Iolanthe* etc.' Alas, details of Stravinsky's interest in G&S were subsequently garbled by a ghost writer, and Stravinsky fans who bridle at the idea of their modernist hero relishing anything so 'vulgar' dismiss the very idea.



Peter Maxwell Davies

At the tender age of four, Maxwell Davies was taken to a performance of *The Gondoliers* at Salford Central Mission (sadly, since demolished); he was so enchanted that he became a lifelong G&S fan, and decided then and there to become a composer.



Freddie Mercury

A Night at the Opera may have been the title of the 1975 Queen album, but the closest it came to that genre was Freddie Mercury's 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the middle section of which one critic aptly described as 'Gilbert and Sullivan operatics'. Mercury had an enduring affection for G&S and sang several of their hits when relaxing with musician friends.

of Sullivan's orchestral accompaniment I find myself admiring.

At his best, Sullivan throws in musical details which transform his songs from merely tuneful to something far more resonant. Take another, far lesser known aria – that of the Prince of Monte Carlo in G&S's final show, *The Grand Duke*. After that show's opening night, the Prince's roulette song was cut by Gilbert (often not the best judge of which songs should be axed – witness the near loss in *The Mikado* of the title character's song), but it is a real gem which again shows Sullivan's intense engagement with Gilbert's text. The music both captures the swagger of a vain man who has regained his fortune, while evoking a gambler's excitement at the roulette table, its skipping rhythm and *rallentandos* imitating the roulette ball's dance before it settles in a numbered pocket.

There is tenderness in G&S, too, though usually with a sting in its tail. *Patience* is perhaps their most sustained essay in longing and often forlorn hope, a sentiment that runs like a subterranean river in a comedy about two absurdly pretentious poets who vie for the adoration of 'the young ladies'. Even if Gilbert did not intend that subtext, it is surely there in Sullivan's wistful music. This makes all the more touching the score's one moment of unadulterated calm: the sextet 'I hear the soft note', sung in Act I's finale by three Dragoon Guards officers reunited with their fiancées, who together swear 'never, oh never, our hearts will range From that old, old love again!'. Such is the touching simplicity and apparent sincerity of their music that we are all the more appalled and amused when the next moment Grosvenor, a vision of youthful beauty, makes his first appearance before the ladies; instantly distracted, the women are beguiled the moment Grosvenor confesses he's 'aesthetic and poetic' and abandon their beaus for their new idol.

All that said, it is the catchy showtunes which are more widely remembered, often misleading people into thinking G&S is a pushover for amateurs. While much of the music was written for actor-singers rather than professionally trained singers, generally Sullivan's music demands more from its performers than do Rodgers and Hammerstein or Sondheim musicals. As Jackie Mitchell, a well experienced director and performer of a wide variety of musicals (and by day, a high-level research scientist), tells me: 'If you do Gilbert and Sullivan you are extremely well prepared for almost any type of musical. And it is more possible in



their shows to find a way to involve an amateur performer, no matter their talent or physical state.' Certainly, G&S shows are not noted for energetic song-and-dance routines (though there are certainly dance episodes) and the music – as Eli Corp insists – is of outstanding importance.

Yet among the challenges (not forgetting coloratura soprano roles), Sullivan included several straightforward yet highly effective numbers. Personable ditties such as 'A policeman's lot' in *Pirates* are still sure-fire hits with audiences. The Sergeant, as it happens, is one of those plum roles ideal for those wanting a share of the spotlight without the bother of learning a full-length role; indeed, there are quite a few G&S bass-baritone roles that don't appear until Act II – such as the Mikado, Sir Roderic (in *Ruddigore*) and Private Willis (*Iolanthe*) – yet have highly effective and memorable arias. (The catch, in amateur productions at least, is that singers of those roles are usually expected to join the chorus in Act I, necessitating a complete change of character and appearance.) And for women desiring a solo but not a full principal role, there are even shorter gems. One example is within the opening chorus of *Patience*, where one of the lovelorn maidens, Ella, has her brief but touching moment of song: 'Go, breaking heart'. She also has the privilege of taking the top line of the sextet 'I hear a soft note' mentioned earlier.

Even the chorus has its challenges. The cliché of repeating what a principal has just sung may

pop up extensively in *Trial by Jury*, *HMS Pinafore* and *Pirates of Penzance* (the last mentioned even pokes fun at this convention in its Act I finale), but hardly occurs at all in subsequent shows. Often enough the chorus is a protagonist in its own right, whether King Hildebrand's army in *Princess Ida*, the irritating bridesmaids in *Ruddigore* or, of course, the jury in *Trial*. And Sullivan often presents daunting but worthwhile musical challenges for his chorus. One highly characteristic trick is presenting two contrasting choruses – typically a graceful women's chorus, followed by a more boisterous male chorus – then subsequently revealing their perfect 'fit' by having them sung simultaneously ('Welcome, gentry' in *Ruddigore* is one fine example). And some of Sullivan's ensembles involving both chorus and principals, particularly in the earlier operettas, are devilishly difficult. One notorious example is the sextet plus chorus in *Trial by Jury*, 'A nice dilemma', where a great deal of the chorus sings off-beat triplet quavers. Yet the exhilaration of mastering these choruses noticeably increases the company spirit, with a sense that everyone is truly investing in the show.

Recently, I joined a G&S society Zoom meeting. It was touching to see so many familiar faces, even without the chance to sing or act together. Still, there was that lack – and I am sure that others felt this too, though nobody said anything about it. No surprise, perhaps, that our shy but highly gifted tenor and comic actor was absent. ☺



At his best, Sullivan throws in musical details which transform his songs from merely tuneful to something far more resonant

Challenge accepted:
'I feel particularly
honoured to win in a
year as difficult as this'



RPS Music Awards 2020



This year's victorious conductor Dalia Stasevska talks to *Freya Parr* about her hugely successful first year with the BBC Symphony Orchestra

Conductor **Dalia Stasevska**

In a year with so little live music, the winners of this year's Royal Philharmonic Society Awards have been forced to go above and beyond what would usually be expected of artists and musicians.

'I feel particularly honoured to win in a year as difficult as this,' says Dalia Stasevska, winner of the Conductor Award. Her victory is testament to the fact that she has thrived despite the difficult

conditions, having taken on the role of principal guest conductor with the BBC Symphony Orchestra last summer. 'We only managed to do one concert at the Barbican before lockdown,' she explains. 'I had a lot scheduled for the springtime, all of which was then cancelled.'

As lockdown eased over the summer, Stasevska was able to join her orchestra again. 'Somehow we've been able to grow together, despite not being able to play as

a full orchestra,' she says. 'There's a real feeling of community.' Together they played a handful of major concerts, not least the Last Night of the Proms and the orchestra's 90th birthday celebrations, the latter of which was a celebration of Finnish and British music over the years. Stasevska is not the only Finn at the helm of the BBC Symphony Orchestra: Sakari Oramo, the orchestra's chief conductor and previous RPS Conductor Award-winner,

is another Finnish maestro making waves in the UK. In Stasevska's first live concert back after lockdown, she joined Oramo with fellow Finns Esa-Pekka Salonen, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Klaus Mäkelä in a celebration of their teacher Jorma Panula's 90th birthday. How does Finland keep producing such prodigious conducting talent? 'It's down to Jorma and the great education system in Finland,' suggests Stasevska. 'Everyone can study music from a very early age and has equal opportunities – it's responsible for creating so many brilliant conductors.'

At just 35 years old, Stasevska is part of the next generation of these great Finnish conductors working internationally. She's had a long affinity with the UK, having conducted one of her earliest international

'I've had to learn how to rehearse an orchestra in a totally different way'

concerts in Leeds with Opera North in 2018. 'I immediately called my agent and said, "this is incredible; I love the sound, I love the people here". The pace at which people work here is very similar to Finland,' she says. 'The string sound always has such a warmth to it. UK orchestras hold a special place in my heart.'

From next September, however, Stasevska's time will be divided between the UK and her native Finland again, when she takes over as chief conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra. 'It's a very progressive orchestra,' says Stasevska. 'There are fresh new ideas about the way we function as a "green" orchestra as well as the way we programme music.' She's also excited about the potential to perform more Finnish music, repertoire she's always championed. 'The orchestra has traditions in playing Sibelius's music, which suits me perfectly.'

Stasevska has always been an advocate for bringing diverse styles of music together. It's why she's remained committed to opera and symphonic music in equal measures throughout her career.

'When I conduct symphonic repertoire, I think in an operatic way and vice versa,' she reveals. But it's not just the variation of artistic styles that appeals – it's also the logistics. 'It's good for me to settle in one place for a few months and work on one project with a big opera company and lots of people, but it's also important for me to have the fast pace of orchestral life.'

The idea of such an active musical life feels like a distant reality at the moment. Even with Stasevska's growing calendar with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, it's been a huge challenge to adapt to this new way of working. 'People don't realise how long sound actually takes to travel,' she says. 'I've had to learn how to rehearse an orchestra in a totally different way – we're having to work on things that ordinarily would be so natural, like playing pizzicato together. We're even having to reconsider how to turn pages, because everyone's so spread out. String players in particular are trained to play in tight groups, sitting next to their colleagues, which isn't possible.'

It's certainly a challenge for any conductor to face, let alone one in the first major role of her career. But it's a challenge Stasevska is grasping with both hands. 'This is a new reality for artists and conductors,' she notes. 'It's given me renewed hope and inspiration to keep progressing forward as much as we can.'



Best of British: 'I love the sound and the people'

Royally honoured

The RPS Award recipients in full



Artistic triumph: soprano Natalya Romaniw

Gold Medal

Composer John Williams (see p26)

Gamechanger Award

Conductor Jane Glover

Chamber-Scale Composition

Naomi Pinnock: *I Am, I Am*

Concert Series and Events

Venus Unwrapped (Kings Place)

Ensemble

Scottish Ensemble

Impact

Sound Young Minds

(City of London Sinfonia)

Instrumentalist

Violist Lawrence Power

Large-Scale Composition

Frank Denyer: *The Fish that*

Became the Sun

Opera and Music Theatre

Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (Garsington)

Singer

Soprano Natalya Romaniw (above)

Storytelling

Rough Ideas by Stephen Hough (left)

Young Artist

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Inspiration Awards

Concerteenies

Diocese of Leeds: Schools Singing

Programme

Stay At Home Choir

The Opera Story: Episodes

#UriPosteJukebox

Virtual Benedetti Sessions

NIKOLAI LUND, JARMO KATILA, PATRICK ALLEN

NIKOLAI LUND, JARMO KATILA, PATRICK ALLEN

Longyearbyen Svalbard

Oliver Condy heads north and beyond the Arctic Circle for a chamber music festival rich in atmosphere and top-quality performances



Peter Herresthal is worried about his violin. The Norwegian virtuoso is here to perform at the Arctic Chamber Music Festival's gala concert up in one of Svalbard's disused coal mines, Mine 3, and dry freezing air could spell trouble for his delicate instrument. His concern is understandable – the chill hits you as soon as you step outside Longyearbyen's tiny airport. Gloves and hats aren't just advised this far into the Arctic Circle, they're essential. Winter day temperatures are routinely down to minus 20 degrees Celsius, and exposing your

hands for just a few seconds to take a photo is something you come to regret soon enough. Wearing the right kit is the key to enjoying Svalbard – don't even think of coming here without the right layers, plus hat, gloves and footwear (all detailed by season on the island's website).

Part buzzing arctic research centre, part thriving community, its capital Longyearbyen is a compact and well-served town much like any other. Among the wooden houses, shops, post office, bank and usual staples are lovely bars and restaurants that feel all the more

welcoming out of the blistering cold. You can walk around Longyearbyen's perimeter in less than a day, popping into the little church or sniffing out the world's northernmost brewery, all the while admiring the snowy peaks that keep guard over the town. It's best to remember that it's illegal to leave the city limits without an armed guide – polar bear sightings are rare and attacks even rarer, but still...

Adjacent to the university is Longyearbyen's superb museum, which recounts the island's natural history and its former whaling and mining industries.



Mining on Svalbard was pioneered in the late 19th century by the American John Munro Longyear and was the foundation for the settlement. All over the island lie reminders of the Arctic Coal Company's complex transportation systems – the wooden structures that supported its cable cars are listed and stand as reminders of the islanders' impossibly harsh way of life. Up near the disused mines on Svalbard's hillsides you can get the best views of the northern lights – ironically, the island is just a little too far north for decent displays (you're better off down on mainland Norway), but there's something soul-enriching about seeing the aurora glimmer faintly above the silent, snowy wastes at 78 degrees north latitude.

Being under Norwegian control, it comes as no surprise that Longyearbyen is blessed with a vibrant arts scene, including the Polarjazz and Dark Season Blues festivals, as well as several amateur choirs, all complemented by a new arts centre, the Kulturhuset, that caters for cinema, art exhibitions and music of all genres. The Kulturhuset is also base camp for the Arctic Chamber Music Festival (ACMF) which has its fourth outing next year, from 18–21 February, at a time when Svalbard emerges from its 24-hour wintry darkness, the barely rising sun topping the mountains in a radiant corona of blue light for just an hour each day. While many of the ACMF events take place at the Kulturhuset, past festivals have included a concert in the now-deserted Russian

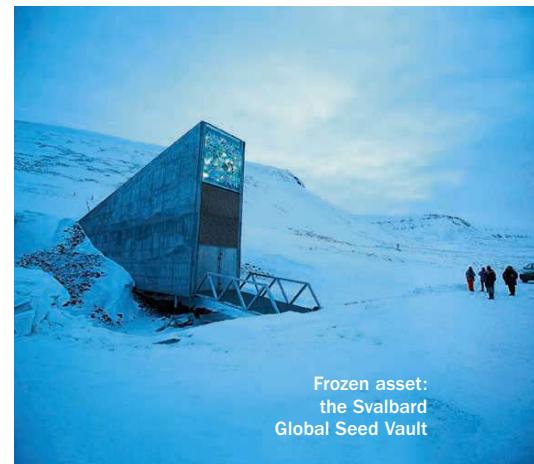
outpost of Barentsburg and up at the Huset, a community centre that boasts a large auditorium and which now hosts one of the Arctic's finest restaurants.

'The ACMF takes place at a time when the light is starting to return, so it's a very special time in Svalbard,' says programme director Catharina Bilsbak. February's festival, she reveals, will include Norway's Voksenåsen Academy, including

'The ACMF takes place when the light is starting to return – a very special time'

masterclasses and concerts by the NOVO and Abeo quartets, as well as visits from Norwegian violinist sisters Ragnhild and Eldbjørg Hemsing. Members of the Norway-based Arctic Philharmonic, whether assembled as the Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta or performing as separate chamber groups and soloists, will also appear. Svalbard and music, believes Bilsbak, is a very potent combination at this time of year. 'People are still in a reflective state of mind in February,' she says, 'but they're starting to look forward. It's a perfect time to meet people through art, as everyone is very open.'

After our conversation we head up to Mine 3 with 100-or-so other audience



Exploring Svalbard Snowy adventures

Surely anyone who makes the trip to Longyearbyen is predisposed to adventure, so an excursion out of Longyearbyen is a must. Husky sledding is as thrilling as it sounds, as you get to harness up and steer a cohort of dogs across the snowy flats (www.svalbardhusky.no) while snowmobiles can whisk you on a day trip to the Russian outpost of Barentsburg, on a glacier safari or an adventure to an ice cave (svalbardadventures.com). One or two operators can also take you to the exterior of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, an internationally important repository of crop seeds, insuring against the unthinkable.

members in a convoy of coaches. The mine's cavernous machinery hall, now an atmospheric museum, hosts the Arctic Philharmonic Sinfonietta under US conductor Tim Weiss in a performance of Lasse Thoresen's *The Sound of the Arctic*, a new work that whips up a vivid soundscape of whistling wind, cracking ice, driving snow and eerie quiet. Missy Mazzoli's elegiac chamber concerto *Dark with Excessive Bright*, meanwhile, gives Peter Herresthal a chance to lay his fears to rest. We may be wrapped up in our thermals, but the Arctic Chamber Music Festival is, it turns out, a dab hand at creating a warm atmosphere. ☺

Further information You can buy a package trip to February's ACMF that includes tickets, hotel and transport on Svalbard. Email post@arktiskfilharmoni.no for details.

BBC
RADIO 3 **Composer of the Week**



is broadcast on Radio 3
at 12pm, Monday to

Friday. Programmes in December are:

30 November – 4 December **Beethoven**
7–11 December **George Benjamin**
14–18 December **Beethoven**
28 December – 1 January **Amy Beach**

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

Adam's style



Lightness

Adam is not a light music composer, but he does have a lightness of style. The mysterious woodwind chords that set the scene for

Act II of *Giselle* hint at another world rather than threaten terror. And while the harp solo that accompanies the Queen of the Wilis gliding across the stage *en pointe* is a Romantic trope, Adam lets the simplest of melodies float to the surface.

Instrumentation Adam's unfussy instrumentation is at the service of the drama. *Le Corsaire* begins with rolling timpani and swashbuckling fanfares before the first melody, which elegantly moves through the orchestra, permitting each section to display its skills.

Orchestration Adam is a master of orchestration. The hunting horns that introduce Chapelou's fiendish aria 'Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire' tell us we are chasing something special vocally. And they and the chorus are there to sign off that formidable top D.

Rhythm If Adam has an innate sense of drama in his ballets and operas, he also has an instinct for rhythm. The overtures he composed for the theatre tease our expectations – listen to conductor Richard Bonynge's (above) handsome account of the overture to Adam's two-act ballet *Le diable à quatre*.

Adolphe Adam

You may know him largely for one carol and a popular ballet but, says *Christopher Cook*, there's much more to the French composer

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

If not a footnote to the history of early-19th-century French music, Adolphe Adam is often little more than a brief parenthesis. Yet this is the composer who bequeathed us *Giselle*, a definitive Romantic ballet which remains in the repertoire of any self-respecting classical dance company. Then there is *Cantique de Noël*, a much-loved carol which we sing as 'O Holy Night', and *Le postillon de Lonjumeau*, a comic opera that seems to be edging its way out of the wings again.

How unjust, you may think, to a composer who wrote over 50 operas, including *Lambert Simnel* and a Bonaparte one-acter *Joséphine*, or the *Return from*

charge. On both occasions, Adam slipped across the Channel, staying for three years in the 1830s in London, where his brother-in-law François Laporte was musical director at Covent Garden. Inevitably, the issues that whirled through French politics in the first half of the 19th century – liberty, class and freedom; gender, too, perhaps – find their way into Adam's work.

Adolphe Adam was born in Paris in 1803. His father, christened Ludwig, was from Alsace and settled in Paris where he changed his name to Louis. A composer too, he taught at the Paris Conservatoire. At the age of 18, Adolphe himself was admitted to the Conservatoire, where he

Adolphe Adam was at the heart of Parisian musical life for nearly a quarter of a century

Wagram, as well as a clutch of other ballets including his final score, *Le Corsaire*, which continues to offer male dancers the chance to leap their hearts out. Adam was also at the heart of Parisian musical life for nearly a quarter of a century. His music is graceful and always fit for purpose, if sometimes too manicured for some tastes.

In one sense Adam is the quintessential French Romantic composer, yet when you look and listen closely you understand also that this is an artist who allows the tenor of his own confusing political times to seep into his work. Twice his career was interrupted by revolution: the so-called July Revolution of 1830, when after three days of violent protest Charles X, the last Bourbon king of France, was sent off on his travels; and then 18 years later, when Charles's successor Louis Philippe was overthrown and another Napoleon took

studied organ and harmonium and played the triangle in the Conservatoire orchestra. More importantly for his career, he studied with the composer François-Adrien Boieldieu, whose music Berlioz said had 'a pleasing and tasteful Parisian elegance'.

When Adolphe failed to win the Prix de Rome, the greatest prize for any French music student, Adam *père* was unhappy about his son embarking on a musical career. Not to be discouraged, Adolphe began writing songs for Parisian theatres and playing in the orchestra at the Gymnase Dramatique, later becoming its chorus master. In 1825, he helped Boieldieu prepare parts for *La dame blanche*, also making a piano reduction of the score. The opera was a triumph and Adam, scarcely out of his teens, was associated with a hit.

Boieldieu's libretto, which fashionably stitched together bits and pieces from ➤





Steps in time: Margot Fonteyn as Giselle in 1946; (left) *Le Corsaire* performed at Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, 2016

the novels of Sir Walter Scott, was written by Eugène Scribe, the foremost French theatre wordsmith of the age. Adam had collaborated with two of the most influential men within the closed world of Parisian opera, and in time Scribe would provide the words for Adam's greatest early success – first performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1834, *Le Chalet* tells a tale of love and marriage with musical echoes of Rossini's last masterpiece, *William Tell*.

It's clear that Adam was re-imagining the traditions of the Opéra-Comique, in which musical numbers were interspersed with spoken dialogue. If Rossini and Donizetti still dominated the tradition of comic opera across town at the Théâtre-Italien, Adam was making a modest bid for a French style of comic opera. You might go further and argue that *Le Chalet* was a kind of godfather to operetta that, within 20 years, Offenbach would make his own.

What Adam also revealed in *Le Chalet*, which by 1873 had chalked up 1,000 performances at the Opéra-Comique, was an unerring sense of theatre. In his next major success, *Le postillon de Lonjumeau*, he extended that instinct through three acts, including a fearsomely difficult aria, 'Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire', for the hero Chapelou, with a top D that takes even the greatest tenor to the edge of beyond.

Chapelou, a coachman recently married to Madeleine, is lured away from the country to become an opera singer. His tempter is the Marquis de Corcy, who leads

the Paris opera and has his lecherous eye on Madeleine. In the final act before the Marquis is defeated by a reunited husband and wife, there's enough business for a Georges Feydeau-style farce, all deftly set to music before the happy couple vow from henceforth to live like decent village people.

If *Le postillon de Lonjumeau* satirises the opera business, it also casts a critical eye on aristocratic privilege. What is

Chapelou's top D takes even the greatest tenor to the edge of beyond

explored are the pretensions of social class and, perhaps, a kind of equality between ordinary men and women. Is Adam so very far from the egalitarian instincts that drove liberal thought in 19th-century France? The composer himself remained silent about his politics, but not his art. 'My only ambition,' he wrote, 'is to write music that is transparent, easy to understand and amusing to the public, and I shall not stop writing until the public tires of my work.' This is an artist so sure of his gifts that he can wrap them up in irony.

Listening to *Giselle*, or rather trying to understand the ballet that Adam actually composed, you quickly get the measure of

those gifts and his compositional skills. You can see the perspiration behind inspiration. We think of *Giselle* as a danced story about a young country girl driven to her death by the callous behaviour of her aristocratic lover, Albrecht. The dance is the story. But it was a very different work that audiences came to see at the Salle Le Peletier in June 1841, with the incomparable Carlotta Grisi as the heroine of this new ballet-pantomime. Almost a half of the two-act piece consisted of mime and action scenes that conveyed the story to the audience – some 54 minutes – while just an hour was devoted to dancing.

The poet Théophile Gautier was one of the two men who created the scenario for *Giselle*, which borrows the Wilis – those souls of abandoned women who dance faithless men to their deaths – from the German poet Heine with a nod towards Victor Hugo. Gautier was an old hand at devising such scenarios: 'In France the choice of subject is very important. The French are not artistic enough in the true sense of the term to be satisfied with the plastic content of poetry, painting, music and the dance. They also require a clear cut meaning, a theme, a logical dramatic development, a moral, a clearly defined meaning.'

Adam rises magnificently to the challenge of providing that meaning in *Giselle*. We know the Wilis and their Queen Myrthe are an international band of wronged women because Adam gives

ADAM Life & Times

them hints of national dances. We know that the story is set on the East bank of the Rhine because when Giselle leads her friends in a dance in Act I it is a waltz – the Giselle Waltz. Adam himself is reported as having said that this waltz had ‘all the German colour indicated by the locality’.

In action passages, Adam’s music mimics speech patterns so that we almost feel the characters are talking to each other – for instance, when Albrecht’s fiancé Bathilde gives Giselle a necklace. And the use of simple leitmotifs reminds us who the characters are and what they have already said and done. How revealing that Richard Wagner, the master of the leitmotif, was in the audience for *Giselle* when it was premiered in Paris in 1841.

In 1847, six years after that premiere, Adam invested heavily in founding a new opera house in Paris, the Opéra-National. The venture proved a disaster – with the French capital beset by the revolution that brought the end of Louis Philippe’s reign, the venue was forced to close, leaving Adam’s finances in tatters.

To make ends meet, he turned briefly to music journalism and, from 1849, took on the role of professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire. Eventually his debts were repaid, but he continued to compose prolifically right until the end of his life. His successful Byron-inspired ballet *Le Corsaire* premiered in January 1856, while on 29 April of the same year, *Les Pantins de Violette* also had its first performance, just four days before its composer died in his sleep at the comparatively young age of 53.

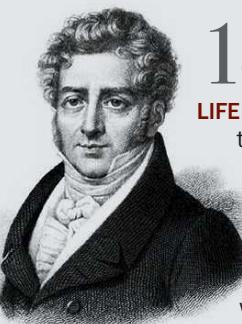
While Adam’s name may not be that familiar today, his contribution to the Christmas musical tradition most certainly is. Initially composed to help celebrate the renovation of the church organ in Roquemaure, near Avignon, Adam’s *Cantique de Noël* was first performed by the opera singer Emily Laurey in 1847 – its famous English words, ‘O holy night’, were written by the Boston minister John Sullivan Dwight eight years later. Today, his delightful carol is a global favourite, sung with equal enthusiasm by church choirs and pop stars alike (including, in 1994, Mariah Carey, no less). At Christmas, at least, Adolphe Adam is anything but a footnote. ☺



1803

LIFE: Adolphe Adam is born on 24 July in **Paris**. Though his father Jean-Louis is a composer and music teacher, he is not at all keen for Adolphe to study music seriously.

TIMES: The United Kingdom declares war on France after the latter refuses to remove its forces from Dutch territory, so beginning the Napoleonic Wars.

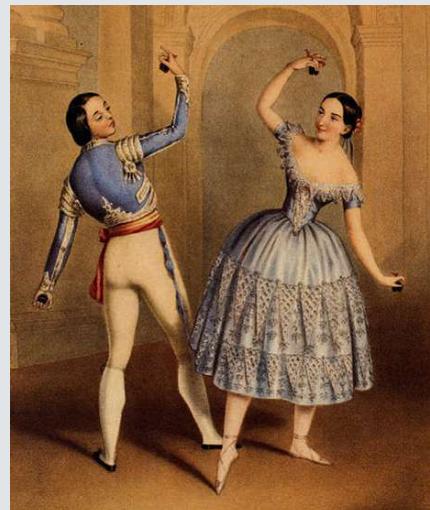


1821

LIFE: He enters the Paris Conservatoire, where he studies organ and harmonium with the esteemed composer

François-Adrien Boieldieu and plays percussion in the orchestra.

TIMES: Six years after being exiled to Longwood House on the South Atlantic island of St Helena, Napoleon Bonaparte dies at 51 of stomach cancer.



1830

LIFE: After the July Revolution in France, he moves to London for three years. There, his operas *His first campaign* and *The dark diamond* are premiered at Covent Garden.

TIMES: Shortly before the November Uprising breaks out in Poland, Frédéric Chopin leaves Warsaw, heading first for Vienna and then Paris, where he settles.

1841

LIFE: His ballet *Giselle* is premiered at the Salle Le Peletier in Paris, with the Italian ballerina **Carlotta Grisi** in the title role. The work rapidly enjoys global success.

TIMES: The Parisian chemist Eugène-Melchior Péligot isolates the first ever sample of uranium metal by heating uranium tetrachloride with potassium.

1847

LIFE: He borrows heavily to open a new opera house, the Théâtre National, in Paris. The following year’s revolution causes it to close, leaving him badly in debt.

TIMES: The Parisian courtesan **Marie Duplessis** dies of tuberculosis aged 23. The mistress of author Alexandre Dumas, she is the inspiration for his novel *La dame aux camélias*.



1856

LIFE: Four days after the first performance of his comic opera *Les Pantins de Violette*, he dies, aged 53, in Paris. He is buried in the city’s Monmartre Cemetery.

TIMES: The painter Edouard Manet opens his first studio in Paris. Focusing on subjects from everyday life, his early major works include *The Absinthe Drinker*.

Orgelbüchlein

Johann Sebastian Bach

Paul Riley embarks on a liturgical journey as he chooses the finest recordings of Bach's collection of intricately crafted organ preludes



The composer

JS Bach was in his early 20s when began work on the *Orgelbüchlein*. He had recently become organist at the court in Weimar after two years at the Blasius Church in Mühlhausen and would remain there until 1717, gaining a promotion to Konzertmeister (director of music) along the way though eventually falling out with his employer. Keyboard and orchestral works plus a handful of early cantatas dominated his output during a nine-year period that also saw his first wife, Maria Barbara, bear seven children, though tragically three died in infancy.

The work

Bach never lost the habit of teaching. Even at the end of his life, in a 'Musical Offering' to the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, he teased prospective performers with a set of canons whose solution would tax their puzzle-solving abilities. Then again, that tendency had manifested itself right from the start; and in his first collection of pieces – the *Orgelbüchlein* ('Little Organ Book') assembled for the most part during his time as organist then Konzertmeister at Weimar – a subsequently appended title

seasonal preludes were added to ponder more generally on aspects of faith and belief. Accordingly, in c1708 Bach bound together manuscript paper measuring six-and-a-half inches by seven-and-a-half (the Little Organ Book is 'little' in more senses than one!), ruled out the staves and entered the title of 164 chorales. Perhaps at the back of his mind was a change of post (or at least, as it turned out, the application of a little leverage to enhance his situation in Weimar); in any event, and in no particular order, he composed or copied in over 40

Most of the preludes are undeniably 'little', but each one is a masterpiece in miniature

page lays bare his didactic ambitions. Its purpose, he proposed, was to educate the fledgling organist in the various ways of elaborating a chorale melody and, in passing, develop a sound pedal technique since 'the pedals are treated in the chorales therein as entirely *obbligato*' (which meant that his students had no choice but to use the pedals at a time when they were often deemed optional). Typically, Bach also signed off his collection with a homely rhyming couplet commanding the contents to the praise of 'God most high' and to the tutoring of his neighbours.

The scheme was a bold one. Prophetic, too, in the light of the later cantata cycles and completist projects such as the *Art of Fugue*. The *Orgelbüchlein* would track the liturgical year with a set of chorale preludes starting in Advent, advancing through Christmas to Pentecost; plus non-

preludes over the next few years, before effectively shelving the project during his time at Köthen from 1717-23.

Eying up the prospect of becoming Kantor at St Thomas Church, Leipzig, a job that carried with it responsibility for teaching in the Thomasschule, Bach suddenly felt even more keenly his lack of a university education, and in order to appeal to Leipzig's penchant for collections that came with a teaching function stitched in, decided to revisit the *Orgelbüchlein* together with the 24 preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the two- and three-part inventions and sinfonias.

Despite a few revisions and additions, the *Orgelbüchlein*, however, remained 'little' in another sense. He had undershot his target of 164 pieces by over two thirds, and it's not entirely clear what caused



Private moments: Bach plays for Frederick the Great; (right) 'Das alte Jahr' from the *Orgelbüchlein*; (below) Albert Schweitzer, who saw the collection as a 'dictionary' of Bach's musical language

him to lose interest in the collection. Measured by the number of bars, most of the preludes are undeniably 'little', but each one is a masterpiece in miniature – small but perfectly formed. And as a 'how to' of compositional templates they show how to embellish a melody with heart-breaking pathos ('O Mensch bewein' or 'Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein', for example); or how canonic engagement needn't be dry, however erudite – 'In dulci jubilo' pulls off a Christmas cracker with two simultaneous canons, one between the outer parts, one binding the gurgling inner triplets. But for Bach it's never just about the notes. Even counterpoint is harnessed to illuminate both the literal and theological 'Affekt' of the words of the chorales' text. An angular downward pedal swoop underlines the fall of Adam throughout the spellbinding 'Durch Adams Fall', for instance, whilst a dense skein of tortured harmony meditates on the consequences. And the passing of the old



year is mourned in twisting chromaticism throughout 'Das alte Jahr vergangen ist'.

The scholar and organist Albert Schweitzer was a little over the top in describing the *Orgelbüchlein* as 'one of the greatest events in all music', but less so when he dubbed it 'the dictionary of Bach's musical language, the key to the understanding of his music as a whole'. And Brahms studied it intently when he came to compose that most unexpected of swansongs: his 11 Chorale Preludes Op. 122. It was Mendelssohn, though, who was responsible for the work's (slightly truncated) publication. Bach might have been working in miniature, but he liked to challenge himself with self-imposed restrictions and enlarged everything he touched. For Mendelssohn, these miniatures carried not only Bach's name, but 'the marks of his genius'. From Advent to Pentecost, the *Orgelbüchlein* is literally a collection for all seasons.

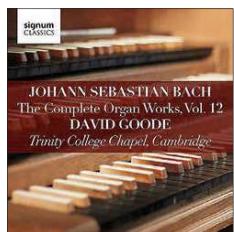
*Turn the page to discover which recordings of JS Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* we recommend*

Magic of Metzler:
David Goode brings
out the organ's best



Artist and instrument in harmony

The best
recording



David Goode

Signum Classics SGCD 812

It's in the nature of completists that no one embarks on a project recording the entire *Orgelbüchlein* without a great deal of thought, so it's no surprise that a strong field proves hard to whittle down – musically there's much unanimity. And what the instrument enables a performer to realise – practically as well as aesthetically – is more than usually important. Perhaps mechanical limitations hobble a performer's preferred tempo, or weaknesses in the pedal department leave a prelude unsupported. And then there's the tremulant.

Does it add a gently undulating pathos, or bleat as if imitating a Wurlitzer?

Built in 1976, the Metzler organ at Trinity College, Cambridge has proved a magnet for organists wanting to record Bach. And to it David Goode has entrusted all 16 volumes of his survey of the 'complete' organ works. It's easy

Thoroughly assimilated, each chorale prelude inhabits its own space

to see why. Tonally it's a good fit, and mechanically it comes with none of the hazards a recalcitrant historic instrument might throw up. It even includes pipework from around the time that Bach composed the first chorale preludes that eventually found a home in the *Orgelbüchlein*. Goode, incidentally, isn't alone in having a soft spot for Metzler – Christopher Herrick's Bach series on Hyperion is also an all-Metzler

Three other great recordings



Ullrich Böhme

As the organist of Leipzig's Thomaskirche for the past 35 years, Böhme presided over the building of the building's 'Bach organ' in 2000. Based on a specification by Bach's uncle Johann Christian, it boasts pedigree and location, neither of which would count for anything without Böhme's instinctive feel for the music's rhetorical integrity. The Lutheran chorale ethos is in his blood and he interrogates each miniature with acuity. Included is the tantalising two-bar fragment 'O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid'; and 'Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ' is gilded with tinkling glockenspiel. (Querstand VKJK0603)



René Saorgin

Recorded in 1982 on the 17th-century organ of the former Burgundian Abbey of Luxeuil, Saorgin's account has worn its years lightly. Completed shortly before Bach's birth, the Luxeuil instrument has an irresistible pungency, and Saorgin exploits it with flairful registrations. Never over-reverential, he can be robust without compromising expressiveness, though if a flutey 'In dulci jubilo' sounds as if too much Christmas pudding has been consumed, the leisurely

affair, spread over several instruments in the company's native Switzerland.

Bach didn't conceive the collection to be played at a sitting, and in theory there's no arc to be described, seeing the collection is incomplete; yet Goode contrives the illusion of a satisfying design (as do Farr and Böhme, above). There's a flow that is anchored by well-chosen tempos, enlivened by artful registration, articulated through a grasp of Bach's structural ingenuities and mindful of the relationship between unuttered words and music.

Goode might take a slightly less spacious view than some of the incomparable 'O

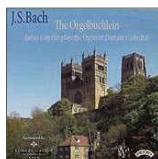
tempo affords maximum intelligibility for Bach's intricate canons. (*Harmonia Mundi HMA1951215*)



Stephen Farr

Released earlier this year, Farr's account also enlists a historic instrument, but one that opens a window onto the sort of sounds Bach knew. Trost was an organ-builder Bach respected, and the capacious organ of Waltershausen's Stadtkirche was built during the composer's first years in Leipzig. If some pipes don't always speak promptly, it's a price worth paying as Farr revels in its intimate possibilities, shaping everything with attentiveness and insight. (*Resonus Classics RES10259*)

And one to avoid...



It would be hard to fault James Lancelot's impeccably considered *Orgelbüchlein* on musical grounds. And

for those allergic to the sometimes exultantly abrasive sounds of a Baroque instrument, the Willis/Harrison organ of Durham Cathedral will afford a degree of well-rounded relief. But while Lancelot is right to argue that Bach's music transcends its medium, in fulsome registrations, some of the clarity and character is compromised by the instrument's romantic 'English' voicings.

Mensch bewein' (the collection's longest chorale prelude) and 'Ich ruf zu dir', but a plangent tremulous keening bids farewell to the old year (BWV614) while New Year's Day ('In Dir ist Freude') is rung in with a thunderous peal of unconfined joy – the pedal reeds respond readily to Goode's incisive footwork. Thoroughly assimilated, each prelude inhabits its own space. But while every detail is weighed, every contrapuntal gesture plotted, there's a spontaneity that delights in BWV 607's murmuration of angels' wings, and imbues the tail-chasing canons of 'In dulci jubilo' with festive good cheer.

MATTHEW O'DONOVAN, GETTY



Baroque influence:
Reger plays the
Sauer organ at the
Leipzig Conservatoire

Continue the journey...

We suggest further works to explore after JS Bach's Orgelbüchlein

The chorale prelude is the organ composer's meat and potatoes. Liturgically useful, ripe with musical possibilities – and brief – it provides a framework and yet affords infinite freedoms. Chorale melodies can be woven among knotty textures, played exultantly on the pedals, given a decorative treatment on a second manual,

and so on. There's no doubt that Bach was influenced by *Buxtehude*'s beautiful chorale preludes, of which just 40 survive. Try the celebratory *Nun lob, mein Seel* BuxWV 212 which packs wonderful musical variety and colour into its four minutes. It can be found on *Splendour*, Kei Koito's exploration of works by various 17th-century German composers including Weckmann and Scheidermann, which is well worth a listen. (*Kei Koito (organ) Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 88985437672*)

A supreme example of a pre-Bach ornamented chorale is *Georg Böhm*'s beautiful *Vater Unser* where the hymn tune is treated almost like a coloratura aria, accompanied by a slow pulsing left hand and pedal. (*Benjamin Alard (organ) Harmonia Mundi HMM90245052*)



The chorale prelude provides a framework yet affords infinite freedoms

Overshadowed of late by his Canon, the Erfurt-based *Pachelbel* (1653-1706) was principally an organist, and his chorale preludes are bedrocks of the genre. The joyous *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* features the chorale melody punched out in the pedals beneath sparkling fugetta manual writing (Werner Jacob (organ) *Erato 7777591975*).

The chorale prelude benchmark, however, rests with JS Bach, and since his death, hundreds of composers have aspired to his gold standard. *Reger* was steeped in Bachian language which you can enjoy in his various collections, including the beautiful *30 Little Chorale Preludes Op. 135a*. Relatively straightforward for both player and listener, they combine a reverence for the past with a deep Romantic flavour (Gerhard Weinberger (organ) *CPO 777539-2*).

Finally, *Brahms*'s 11 organ chorale preludes were the last works he wrote – many pianists have comandeered these poignant gems, but you can discover their true spiritual power in the original scoring (Robert Parkins (organ) *Naxos 8.550824*).

Reviews

110 CDs, Books & DVDs rated by expert critics

Welcome



'Tis the season, and as such we have a sparkling thread of festive reviews in the following pages, starting with a round-up of some must-hear releases. From Bach to Britten and beyond, hopefully there's something for all tastes. There's a party atmosphere, too, with the Kanneh-Masons' delightful *Carnival of the Animals* album and tenors Roberto Alagna and Jonas Kaufmann – who let their hair down for upbeat song selections – and it wouldn't be the Christmas issue without a *Messiah*.

If that wasn't enough, we take trips to 18th-century London and Edinburgh in the Concerto pages, we enjoy some French ballet in Orchestral and our Recording of the Month sees Steven Isserlis and friends explore the emotional final works of John Tavener.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Michael Beek, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchen, Malcolm Hayes, Julian Haylock, Claire Jackson, Daniel Jaffé, Erica Jeal, Berta Joncus, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Roger Nichols, Bayan Northcott, Freya Parr, Steph Power, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Michael Tanner, Roger Thomas, Sarah Urwin Jones, Kate Wakeling

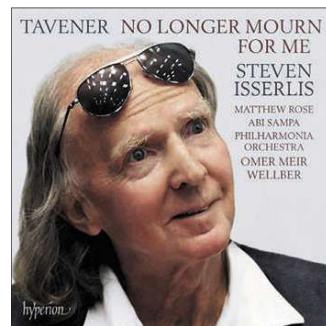
KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

An eloquent and deeply moving Tavener tribute

Steven Isserlis made a promise to the late composer to record his final works, and the result is magical, says *Christopher Dingle*



Tavener

Preces and Responses; The death of Ivan Illyich; Mahámátar; Popule meus; No longer mourn for me
Steven Isserlis (cello), Matthew Rose (bass), Abi Sampa (vocals); Trinity Boys Choir, Philharmonia Orchestra/ Omer Meir Wellber et al
Hyperion CDA68246 71:17 mins

These are among Tavener's most powerful works. They are magnificently performed. Those simple points could easily be lost in the necessity of charting not just the diverse range of music and influences, but also the profoundly personal nature for Steven Isserlis of this remarkable

disc. The works are all from Tavener's final years and, as is clear from his touching, sometimes eloquently confessional booklet notes, Isserlis has a particular association with each piece.

His effective arrangements of two choral pieces for an ensemble of eight cellos frame the disc. The unsung words of priest and congregation are palpable in the Anglican intercessory prayers of *Preces and Responses*, Tavener's last completed work. Similarly, the cello octet is adroit in conveying the assuaging sentiment of *No longer mourn for me*, the last of Tavener's *Three Shakespeare Sonnets*, composed after his heart attack in 2007.

Written shortly before that devastating event, *Popule meus* features aggressive timpani repeatedly rejecting the appeasing resolution proffered by Isserlis's cello and orchestra. The solo cello represents the 'All-Compassionate One' and has enough development in its phrases to ensure this essentially episodic work never becomes predictably



In memoriam:
Omer Meir Wellber
and Steven Isserlis
discuss Tavener's music

mundane. Here, as elsewhere, the Philharmonia under Omer Meir Wellber are assured advocates, the un-named timpanist convincing in the increasingly erratic phrases depicting the antagonism of 'modern man' towards God.

Mahámátar is, by contrast, a beautifully sustained outpouring of wordless praise. The solo cello's chanting over long-breathed orchestral chords is entwined with the improvised ululations of a Sufi singer, in this instance the mesmerising Abi Sampa, while the distantly placed Trinity Boys Choir provides a subtly shimmering aural halo. Wellber ensures the extraordinary, uplifting coming together of these diverse elements is seamless without losing their

individuality. The result is a magical 15 minutes.

Mahámátar was originally written to accompany a film about pilgrimage, but this version was first heard at a 2013 concert in Manchester devoted

Mahámátar is a beautifully sustained outpouring of wordless praise

to Tavener's music given shortly before the composer's death. That event also featured the premiere of *The death of Ivan Ilyich*, an intense, unflinching setting of Tolstoy's story of a dying man's painful anguish. This monodrama features two prominent parts for a pair of trombones, percussion

and strings. While the latter produce the familiar sweet chords, they also skitter and screech unnervingly in response to the stuttering yelps of the text. Putatively sung by a bass-baritone, the singer is required to growl in the depths and glide around in eerily high falsetto. And yet, as is clear from Matthew Rose's devastating performance, these technical challenges are as nothing alongside the fierce emotional commitment required to convey this gripping soliloquy. Culminating in a hard-won 'glimpse of light', *Mahámátar* was written in memory of Isserlis's wife Pauline and is the compelling centrepiece to a rewarding and moving disc.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★

An interview with Steven Isserlis



Was this a cathartic project to finally realise?

It was very satisfying. I was worried until the last moment that something would go wrong. Matthew [Rose] and Abi [Sampa] had to learn their pieces specially, the Philharmonia and I hadn't done it together before and I don't think Omer had ever conducted Tavener. So every element was a risk, but it fell into place on those two days, thank goodness. Tavener's music demands absolute commitment from you emotionally.

You assembled a fantastic group of musicians...

Matthew has been a friend for some years, so it occurred to me that he was of course the person who should be doing it; it's an incredibly tough part, so it was a challenge for him, to which he rose wonderfully. I'd never met Abi before; Hyperion suggested her. I met her on the day, played that first phrase and waited to hear what would happen. Of course, this gorgeous sound came out, so I was very pleased. The octet was a real hand-picked group, including some of my great friends and favourite people I've taught.

Tell us about arranging the pieces for the octet.

They lend themselves well. There were challenges along the way, but basically it's Tavener's pieces as they were written for voices. It was more the solo parts, deciding exactly what to do with them in the *Preces and Responses*; I also had to decide on rhythms and how closely to stick to them. And I do, except for the last pieces which are very long; but I'm basically faithful to the word patterns of the original.



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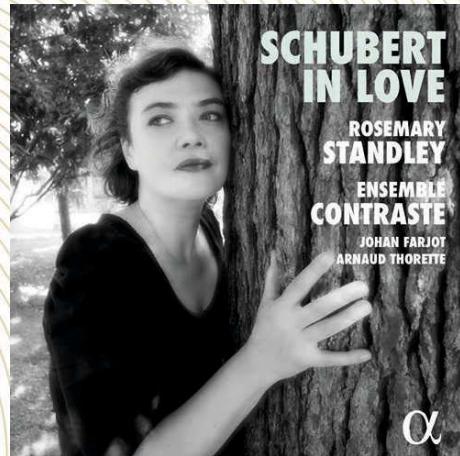
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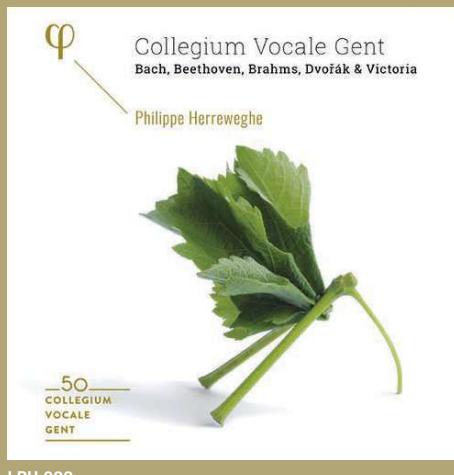
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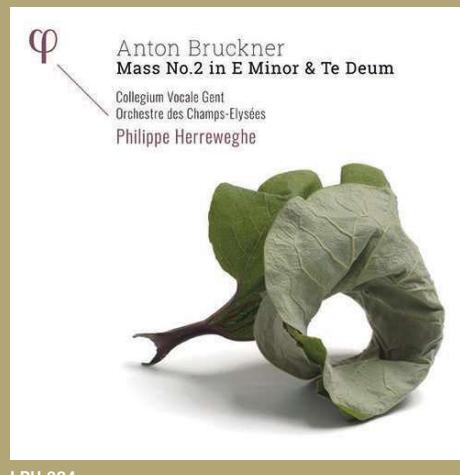
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MUSIC

Christmas

Terry Blain unwraps a selection of this year's very best seasonal choral offerings

Christmas round-up

The *Choral Scholars of University College, Dublin* recently marked their 20th anniversary, and *Be All Merry* is a celebration of the high standards they have reached under founding artistic director



Desmond Earley. The recording mixes interesting arrangements of familiar tunes with

contemporary works, including haunting Irish-language settings by Fionntán Ó Cearbháill and Adhamhnán Mac Domhnaill. No fewer than half the choir's two-dozen members step out for solos, revealing the in-depth quality of Earley's singers. The glowing tonal blend that he elicits is a constant pleasure, and there's a real emotional connection in the performances. (*Signum SIGCD643* ★★★★)

The O Antiphons of English composer Christopher Fox were first performed complete by the *Choir of St Catharine's College, Cambridge* in March this year, and recorded a few days later. They form



the centrepiece of *Alpha & O*, a disc which also includes music by Judith Weir, Diana Burrell

and Jeremy Thurlow. Each of Fox's seven antiphons is preceded by the relevant Gregorian chant, setting the harmonic daring of Fox's harmonic language in sharp juxtaposition. Some of the tight intervals test the choir, but Edward Wickham's astute direction secures generally convincing results. (*Resonus RES10268* ★★★★)

A vibrant, limpid performance of Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* (the four-part version)



sits at the heart of a new album by the mixed-voice *Choir of Clare College, Cambridge*. Conductor Graham Ross relishes the lustiness of 'Wolcum Yole' without allowing scrappiness, and 'There is no rose'

has a wealth of alluringly contoured dynamic detail. Tanya Houghton's harp playing is unfailingly sensitive. A clutch of shorter pieces by Britten is also included, as are works by Ireland, Bridge and Holst. Warm blend, fresh attack and a sense of keen vitality mark all the singing, and the sound is excellent. (*Harmonia Mundi HMM 905329* ★★★★)

The San Francisco-based, 12-man vocal group *Chanticleer* is now in its fifth decade, and *Chanticleer Sings Christmas* was recorded immediately after a run of 2019 seasonal concerts. The repertoire ranges widely, from plainsong through Renaissance composers such as Victoria and Hassler, to pieces commissioned by Chanticleer from Jaakko Mäntyjärvi, Steven Sametz and Rosephanye Powell. Technically the singing is immaculate, though some of the arrangements ('Away in a Manger', 'O Little Town of Bethlehem') may be a little sugar-coated for some. The sound is close, too, conveying a somewhat studio-bound impression. (*Warner Classics 9029522888* ★★★)

The *London Oratory Schola Cantorum* sings mass at the school every Saturday evening in term-time, and *Sacred Treasures of Christmas* is a selection of the liturgical motets it uses for

the holiday season. A feast of Renaissance repertoire is featured, ranging from the ringing carillons of Sweelinck's *Hodie Christus natus est* to the searching introspection of Victoria's *O magnum mysterium*. The 50-strong oratory choir is made up entirely of boys, and conductor Charles Cole draws singing of vernal freshness from them, with excellent ensemble and an interpretive awareness that puts many an adult choir in the shadow. This is a warmly recommended recording. (*Hyperion CDA68358* ★★★★)

CHRISTMAS CHOICE

JS Bach's joyful glow

This new recording of the *Christmas Oratorio* sticks close to its traditions and lifts the spirits



Natural affinity: Stuttgarter Hymnus-Chorknaben does Bach's work proud

JS Bach

Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248

Elizabeth Wimmer (soprano), Elvira Bill (alto), Andreas Post (tenor), Dominic Grosse (bass), Stuttgarter Hymnus-Chorknaben, Handel's Company/Rainer Johannes Homburg *MDG MDG9022183 146:31 mins (2 discs)*

There are numerous good recordings of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* to choose from, but this new one from

Stuttgart has special things going for it. Not least of them is the Stuttgarter Hymnus-Chorknaben, a boys' choir originally modelled after Bach's own Thomanerchor in Leipzig. They make a sound Bach would undoubtedly have approved of – fresh, enthusiastic and with a natural affinity for the Lutheran idiom. The reflective chorales punctuating the six cantatas are unfussily affecting, but the boys have plenty of pep in reserve for the exultant opening of the first cantata, 'Jauchzet, frohlocket', and the zesty choruses bookending the third. The fresh-voiced team of soloists makes an eloquent, unrhetorical impression, in particular the excellent Evangelist, Andreas Post. The neat, agile playing of the period-instrument Handel's Company is a congenial counterpoint, with a trio of brilliant trumpeters led by Wolfgang Bauer. Conductor Rainer Johannes Homburg shapes an interpretation which glows joyfully from within, and lifts the heart in the sincerity of its emotions. A perfect way to celebrate the Christmas season in music. ★★★★



Orchestral

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE



Delibes

Ballet Suites: Sylvia; La Source; Coppélia
Royal Scottish National Orchestra/
Neeme Järvi
Chandos CHSA 5257 (CD/SACD)
82:55 mins

This generously packed disc of extended suites from Delibes's ballets

sparkles from the opening exuberant horn fanfare of *Sylvia* to the final spirited 'Galop' of *Coppélia*. Just as

with their outstanding exploration of Saint-Saëns's orchestral music, Neeme Järvi and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra bring wit, vigour and colour to this effervescent music. Järvi's exceptional experience ensures that favourite moments do not disappoint; insouciant in the 'Pizzicati' from *Sylvia*, carefree in Swanilda's 'Valse' from *Coppélia* and wryly evoking the preening pomposity of the 'Czardas'. Everything feels naturally spontaneous. The ebb and flow

of *Sylvia*'s moonlit 'Valse lente' is perfectly paced, the return of the opening strings sublimely held back by Järvi, while the 'Marche et Cortège de Bacchus' is by turns rousing and totally invigorating.

Between Järvi's selections from *Coppélia* and *Sylvia* comes a generous dose of Delibes's contribution to *La Source*. He essentially provided the central portion of the ballet, the rest being the work of Ludwig Minkus. It is little surprise this delightful music led to the commission for *Coppélia*, for Delibes's talent for writing a

catchy tune, allied to colourful orchestration and rhythmic verve is apparent throughout.

The RSNO is on scintillating form, with idiomatically characterful woodwind, vibrant brass, luminescent strings and crisp percussion. Chandos have also worked wonders with the recording, which is great in stereo and phenomenal in surround, every detail clear, yet with a natural bloom.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

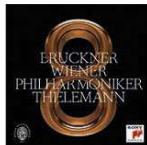
The Royal Scottish National Orchestra is on scintillating form



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Bruckner

Symphony No. 8 in C minor (Haas edition)
Vienna Philharmonic/
Christian Thielemann
Sony Classical 19439786582 80:48 mins



This is Bruckner's last completed symphony, and for me it remains the greatest of his works. Since he came into fashion there have been many recordings of it, and this one takes a certain kind of reading and performance absolutely to the limit. In the first few minutes you have to be overwhelmed by the sheer sound of the Vienna Philharmonic, from the first hushed strings to the full

brass enunciation of the main theme of the movement. But as the work continues, and perhaps above all in the sublime third movement, I found I was more impressed by the splendour of the sound than by the profundity of the music.

There should always be a certain rawness in Bruckner's brass, but here all we have is a staggering display of the instruments of the orchestra. The Vienna Philharmonic can never have sounded so splendid, but as so often with Christian Thielemann structure and depth are sacrificed to glamour, and the end result is the opposite of what Bruckner intended: the amazing end of the work, with the main themes finally united, is as

grand and empty as the last minutes of *Das Rheingold* – but Wagner intended this in what he wrote, and Bruckner emphatically did not.

Michael Tanner

PERFORMANCE

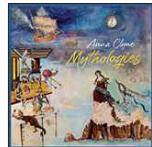
RECORDING

★★★★★

Anna Clyne

Mythologies – The Seamstress*; Masquerade; This Midnight Hour^; Night Ferry^; <<rewind>>†**

*Jennifer Koh (violin), *Irene Buckley (narrator); BBC Symphony Orchestra; **Sakari Oramo, **Marin Alsop, ^Andrew Litton, †André de Ridder
Avie AV2434 66:36 mins



Anna Clyne's *Masquerade* was first heard at the 2013 Last Night of the Proms and, since then,

a snippet has become familiar in Proms adverts across the BBC. Wildly exuberant, the piece suited its celebratory purpose to a T – and its live recording does likewise in opening this album of show-stopping orchestral works, written over a ten-year period.

They are performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under an array of conductors, Marin Alsop at the helm for that dazzling premiere. Sakari Oramo takes the baton with similarly tempestuous

results for *This Midnight Hour* (2015) and *The Seamstress* (2014), a violin concerto-cum-'imaginary one-act ballet' for which the passionate soloist is Jennifer Koh, joined by narrator Irene Buckley. Bursting with kaleidoscopic textures from which folk-like melodies emerge, both works follow Clyne's first ever orchestral piece *Night Ferry* (2012, conductor Andrew Litton) in being part-inspired by poems. Indeed the album title *Mythologies* is taken from a Yeats poem narrated in a section of *The Seamstress* which reveals Clyne at her most lyrically affecting.

The nocturnal works share its ambivalent mood. *This Midnight Hour* is the tauter by far, propelled by Baudelaire's narcotic 'Harmonie du soir' and a striking image of Jiménez's that depicts music as a naked woman running crazily through the 'pure night'. While swashbuckling seascapes form another link between works,

<<rewind>> (2005, conductor André de Ridder) references Clyne's longtime interest in electronics. Here, videotape is imagined being scrolled backwards, glitching dramatically as it goes. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Massenet

Visions; Brumaire – Overture; Phèdre – Overture; Espada Suite; Les Érinnyes – incidental music
Royal Scottish National Orchestra/ Jean-Luc Tingaud
Naxos 8.574178 75:05 mins



As Massenet moved into his 60s in the early 1900s, sadly much of his music reworked earlier ideas to no great benefit. His suite *Espada* of 1908 processes Spanish clichés to deliver the equivalent of processed cheese, while even the overture *Brumaire* of 1900, just short of his 60th birthday, celebrates the centenary of the 1799 *coup d'état* with vulgar tub-thumping. The symphonic poem *Visions* of 1891 offers, in its opening tritones, the unfulfilled hope that Massenet might be developing his language on the forward-looking lines of the *Danse macabre*.

By far the best music comes in his overture *Phèdre* of 1873 and his incidental music to *Les Érinnyes* of 1876. In the latter, only the first two of the six movements refer to

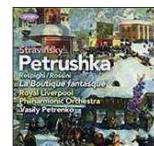


the French version of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and are suitably dramatic in their different ways; the last three movements are merely independent Greek dances (a fact not mentioned in the generally unhelpful liner notes). *Phèdre* shows Massenet at his best, boasting memorable melodic lines, powerful harmonies and vivid orchestration. Jean-Luc Tingaud draws expressive playing from the orchestra throughout and does his best with the weaker moments. It's very unfortunate therefore that the two final G minor chords of *Phèdre*, both marked 'sec' (abrupt), set off a resonance in the hall lasting some seven seconds. I feel I should also point out that the first paragraph of the liner notes on *Les Érinnyes* is an unacknowledged and barely altered borrowing from Irvine's 1994 biography. *Roger Nichols*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Rossini • Stravinsky

Stravinsky: Petrushka (1911); Respighi/Rossini: La Boutique fantasque Suite (arr. Sargent)
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko
Onyx Classics ONYX4192 54:22 mins



Each of the Stravinsky ballets in Vasily Petrenko's Royal Liverpool Philharmonic series has been matched to less than predictable repertoire, and

perhaps this is the most surprising: from pre-war *Ballets Russes* to more Italocentric postwar potpourri in the form of Respighi taking mostly late Rossini rarities for another scenario involving dolls and puppets who come to life. Unfortunately this is the briefest of suite versions, compiled by Malcolm Sargent and missing some of the splendid links as well as the terrific fugal apotheosis. At 40 minutes the complete ballet score, for that matter, would have filled a disc which as it stands is quite short measure. It's a shame because Petrenko has the idiosyncratic fun of a true ballet master with the 'Mazurka', 'Cossack Dance' and 'Can-Can', even if there's a bit too much glissandoing about in what should be the bittersweet 'Valse lente'.

Petrushka, though, remains the selling-point. If not quite the most vivid throughout, it too has original approaches – a clearly articulated speediness, in particular, to the beginning and end of the scene in the Moor's room. There is also excellent continuity between the fairground dances, with a vivid intrusion from the bear and his shrill-piping master. Flute and cor anglais are characterful, trumpets and pianist slightly less so. It's good to get the full glitter of the original 1911 version, not hugely different from the more often preferred 1947 revision, but the xylophone clatter and the occasional extra weight and

snap of brass add spice. Natural if not ideally in-your-face sound, too. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Schmidt

Symphonies Nos 1-4; Notre Dame – Intermezzo

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra/Paavo Järvi
DG 483 8336 180:38 mins (3 discs)



Is Franz Schmidt finally securing due recognition as the last great Austrian symphonist of the late-Romantic era? The enthusiastic reception accorded to two of his symphonies at the BBC Proms over recent years certainly suggests so. I have no doubt too that his music will win over many new admirers thanks to this beautifully played and luxuriantly recorded cycle of concert performances given in Frankfurt between 2013 and 2018.

Paavo Järvi is an almost ideal interpreter of this composer, not only managing to bring transparency and luminosity to Schmidt's often thickly textured orchestration, but also keeping a tight rein on the structural direction of works that in lesser hands can seem to meander. The youthful First Symphony receives an exuberant performance in which Schumann rather than Wagner emerges as the most potent influence. Järvi is no less impressive in the Second Symphony, exerting formidable control over the tricky babbling brook passagework in the opening movement and giving the music a dynamic sense of forward momentum and febrile excitement that is not so evident in other recordings.

In the more emotionally elusive Third Symphony, Järvi emphasises the lyrical and pastoral qualities in the outer movements but also brings a deep sense of foreboding to the darkly chromatic *Adagio*. Best of all is his deeply committed account of the Fourth. Thanks to the sustained almost grief-stricken intensity of the playing, not least the distinguished solo contributions from the trumpet, cor anglais and cello, it proves to be a gripping musical experience from first bar to last. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



A life's work on disc:
Ravel himself features
in this new collection

From the archives

Andrew McGregor lifts the lid on a Warner Classics release charting the complete works of Maurice Ravel



In contrast to Debussy's dishevelled life, Ravel was the dandy perfectionist, and a destroyer and suppresser of his music if he deemed it sub-standard. When Decca decided to mark Ravel's 75th anniversary in 2012 with the first complete edition of his music, the 14-CD set seemed small for such a giant of early 20th-century music, and even then it included things Ravel would probably have thought, indeed preferred, would never be heard again. This new *Ravel: The Complete Works* from Warner Classics (9029528326; 21 CDs) is bigger as it includes five discs containing historic performances from Ravel himself, his friends and first interpreters. So if you don't already have Ravel's piano-roll recordings of his piano music, Ravel conducting *Boléro* and his *Chansons madécasses*, supervising the first recording of his G major Piano Concerto with Marguerite Long, Jane Bathori singing the *Histoires naturelles* dedicated to her, or Ravel's last work *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* with the young Basque baritone Martial Singer, then these and the other historic performances may be enough to make it worth the budget price of the box on their own. In addition to which Warner Classics has access to the vaults of French EMI and Erato, so there's a fine mix of classic and modern recordings.

In the piano works, Bertrand Chamayou shares the billing with Samson François four decades earlier. The chamber music is mostly in the excellent hands of Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Frank Braley and the Ébène Quartet. Orchestral works range widely, with classic accounts from André Cluytens, Jean Martinon and Charles Munch rubbing shoulders with Simon Rattle, Kent Nagano and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Just to list the singers would fill the page, but the range and depth is wonderful, and Mikko Franck's live *L'enfant et les sortilèges* is full of colour and character.

No texts or translations – the Decca box had them all – but an excellent contextual essay from Ravel biographer Roger Nichols is some compensation.

Vaughn Williams

Symphony No. 5; Scenes Adapted from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress

Emily Portman (folk voice), Kitty Whately (mezzo-soprano), Marcus Farnsworth (baritone); BBC Singers Quartet; BBC Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins *Hyperion CDA68325 66:59 mins*



Martyn Brabbins and his musicians generally give a glowing and contemplative account of the Fifth Symphony (1943), its colours well captured in producer Andrew Keener's fine recording. The second movement's fleet scherzo, flowing but with cross-rhythms distinct like a wind tossing and turning various themes, serves as a fine contrast to the slower movements. Brabbins's exceptionally slow *Lento* emphasises the third movement's rapt quality, though its *Animato* middle section, only marginally quicker, suggests a slight cloud in contemplation rather than a moment of spiritual crisis. The finale's reassuring flow, with a very marked *rallentando* before the return of the symphony's opening theme, rounds off this beautiful if not definitive performance.

A good deal of music in the Fifth reached its final form in Vaughan Williams's 1951 opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Brabbins's highly imaginative coupling is the premiere recording of the composer's first treatment of John Bunyan's allegory: the 1906 incidental music, written for an amateur production in Reigate, involved a small string orchestra, a church choir and several singer-actors. The hauntingly beautiful 'The Angel's Song' (invented for the dramatisation, with no basis in Bunyan's story) was later reworked as the opening air in Vaughan Williams's earliest operatic treatment *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, while other cues were reworked in a 1943 radio dramatisation, then used in his 1951 opera; but a fair amount – including cues based on folk dances and songs – was not used again. Most disappointingly, Hyperion's booklet gives scant information about this 1906 adaptation, not even suggesting where the unfamiliar cues might fit into Bunyan's story, which seems particularly unhelpful since the editor of the score Brabbins performs

here, Nathaniel G Lew, published an extensive and detailed article on the original production and its music back in 2003. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

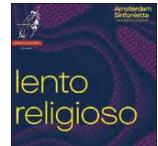


Lento Religioso

Works by Berg, Bridge, Bruckner, Korngold, Lekeu, R Strauss and Wagner arranged for strings

Amsterdam Sinfonietta/
Candida Thompson

Channel Classics CCS36620 76:19 mins



It's something of a gamble to build an entire release around a programme showcasing a sequence of intense rather slow late-Romantic works. Yet the danger of emotional overkill is triumphantly surmounted here not only by Candida Thompson and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta's imaginative playing, but also by the superb sound quality and the judiciously chosen order in which the seven pieces are presented.

The disc takes its title from the slow movement of Korngold's relatively unknown *Symphonic Serenade* of 1948, a heart-rending farewell to the old Europe that the composer had left behind before it had been ravaged as a result of the Second World War. It's performed here with such expressive power that I hope it's not too long before the Amsterdam Sinfonietta commit the entire work to disc.

There are other unexpected novelties which I found equally compelling, in particular the hauntingly performed *Lament* for string orchestra by Frank Bridge, dedicated in memory of a nine-year-old girl who tragically lost her life when a British ocean liner was sunk by a German submarine during the First World War, and the passionate and strongly Wagnerian *Adagio* for string orchestra by the Belgian, Guillaume Lekeu.

Purists may be less convinced by some of arrangements for string orchestra. Despite a deeply committed performance, I can't quite accept strings as an adequate substitute for those quintessential wind chords at the opening of the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Far more convincing is a highly effective transcription of Alban Berg's early Piano Sonata which would make an ideal

Orchestral Reviews

companion piece to Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Erik Levi
PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

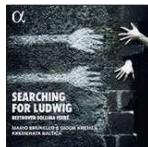
Searching for Ludwig

Beethoven: String Quartets (arr. string orchestra) - No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131; No. 16 in F, Op. 135;

Ferré: Muss es sein? Es muss sein!* (arr. Sivilotti);

Sollima: Note Sconte

Gidon Kremer (violin); *Mario Brunello (cello); Kremerata Baltica *Alpha Classics ALPHA 660* 78:29 mins



The ever-enterprising Gidon Kremer has made a feature of mixing contemporary

with the 'classics' throughout his distinguished career. In this ingenious programme, the relationship between the various pieces is more overt than implied. The title of Léo Ferré's *Muss es sein? Es muss sein!* (Must it be? It Must Be!) refers directly to the principal motifs of the finale of Beethoven's last quartet, No. 16. Here the original scoring of this emphatic six-minuter for symphony orchestra, chorus and speaker has been arranged by Valter Sivilotti for solo cello (Mario Brunello), strings and percussion, with Ferré's own recording of the at times explosive recitation mixed in. If in Beethoven's original a resolution of sorts is found, Ferré obsesses pointedly on the archetype itself.

Giovanni Sollima's *Note Sconte* (Hidden Notes) is a suite – originally for cello ensemble, but here arranged for string orchestra – which draws hypnotically upon thematic fragments found among Beethoven's unused sketches. The result shares a certain familial resemblance to the neo-classical vibe of Karl Jenkins's *Palladio*.

Listening to the two string quartet transcriptions brought to mind the recordings by Kremer's friend and mentor, Leonard Bernstein, with the Vienna Philharmonic (on DG). Yet whereas Bernstein embraced the music's enhanced idiom with (literally) open arms, passionately embracing its full sonic potential, Brunello (No. 16) and Kremer (No. 14) create a sense of introspective awe, closer to the near-suffocating intimacy of the quartet originals. Some might feel the inevitable tonal cushioning

and enhanced sonic amplitude of, say, the explosive middle section of Op. 135's *vivace* second movement, is a semantic gear-change too far. Yet if you can accept the basic convention, these are performances of scorching insight and stature. Julian Haylock

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Sturm und Drang, Vol. 2

JC Bach: Sinfonia in G minor, Op. 6/6; **Gluck:** Paride ed Elene – excerpt*; **Haydn:** Symphony No. 39

in G minor; *Stabat Mater* – *Fac me vere tecum fliere**; **Mysliveček:** Semiramide – *Tu mi disprezzi ingrato**;

Vanhal: Symphony in D minor

*Ida Ränzlöv (mezzo-soprano);

The Mozartists/Ian Page

Signum Classics SIGCD636 70:10 mins

This is the second of seven projected releases in which Ian Page and his period orchestra, The

Mozartists, are exploring the 1760s and '70s during which composers abruptly took to modes of emotional turmoil and driving tension; possibly in reaction to the ornamental prettiness of the rococo style and slightly in advance of a similar development in literature which gave the tendency its slogan of 'storm and stress'. The fierce agitation of the outer movements of Haydn's Symphony No. 39 certainly exemplify such qualities, just as the dynamic sweep and hair-trigger precision of Ian Page's players demonstrate their skill and commitment in articulating them.

The substantial D minor Symphony by Vanhal suggests a fiery stylistic midpoint between Haydn and Mozart – he played string quartets with both of them, while Haydn himself seems to have remembered an idea in the slow movement of the exceptionally laconic G minor Symphony by the 'London' Bach in his own later String Quartet Op. 20, No. 2.

Of the vocal items, delivered with volatile feeling by the Swedish mezzo Ida Ränzlöv, the Gluck arias are troubled and plaintive; more impetuous is a *scena* by the short-lived Josef Mysliveček, while an aria from Haydn's *Stabat Mater* reminds us that a stern austerity was also a feature of 'storm and stress'.

Bayan Northcott

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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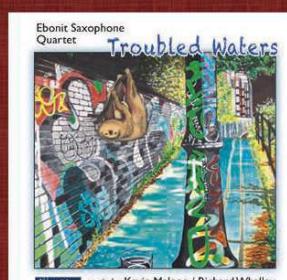
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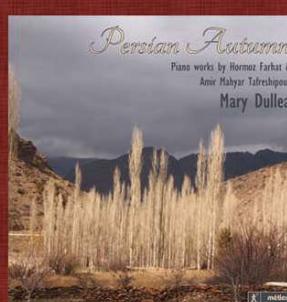
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Concerto

CONCERTO CHOICE



Smaller forces make these Chopin concertos dazzle

Scaling down the composer's works for an intimate setting might be the way forward, says **John Allison**



Seriously brilliant:
Kevin Kenner shows
elegance and poise

Chopin

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11;

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21

(arr. chamber)

Kevin Kenner (piano), Sławomir Rozlach (double bass);
Apollon Musagète Quartett

Frederick Chopin Institute NIFCCD 0220 76:34 mins

Right from the start, Chopin's two piano concertos were performed in intimate settings, and it's well known that the composer himself played them in various chamber versions. No version in chamber form in Chopin's own hand has come

to light, but their publication during the 1830s saw them being issued not only with orchestral parts but as solo works and with quintet accompaniments. Though they have been recorded before in chamber form, this outstanding new release with the pianist Kevin Kenner features his own edition (made in collaboration with Krzysztof Dombek and published by PWM). In keeping with 19th-century practice, the piano reinforces what would have been orchestral tutti. Kenner is joined by the Apollon Musagète Quartett and Sławomir Rozlach (double bass) in

These are performances of greater spontaneity than an orchestra allows

performances of more spontaneity than a conductor and orchestra would normally allow.

The opening of the F minor Concerto sets the tone with transparency and lightness. Ever since winning the Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 1990, Kenner has stood out as an elegant Chopin player, and he captures the yearning of the opening movement as well as its musical urgency and momentum. The slow movement has deep lyrical beauty, and the American pianist is especially poised in the finale. A sense of freshness is all gain in the E minor Concerto, striving and serious but also full of

unrestrained brilliance.

Intimacy is the key to this music, yet too many performances with orchestra sound overblown: once you've heard this, you may well prefer to think of these masterpieces as chamber music.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★★

★★★★★

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Kalevi Aho

Percussion Concerto 'Sieidi'*; Symphony No. 5**

*Colin Currie (percussion); Lahti Symphony Orchestra/Dima Slobodeniouk, with **Jaan Ots *BIS BIS-2336 (CD/SACD) 68:38 mins*



Kalevi Aho (b1949), a prolific orchestral composer of some 17 symphonies to date and

double that in concertos, deserves far greater recognition beyond his native Finland. This impeccably produced album pairs blockbusters from different stages of his career: the percussion concerto *Sieidi* (2010), Aho's most performed work, and the lesser-known yet more compelling Symphony No. 5 (1975-6).

Colin Currie, for whom *Sieidi* was written, delivers a knockout account with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and Dima Slobodeniouk. The Sámi title denotes a place of ancient shamanic ritual, and further cultures are signposted, with African drums part of the percussion line-up; the idiom, though, is robustly western, with Shostakovich a clear influence through eight showpiece sections in which material is spectacularly hurled between soloist and orchestra.

The Symphony, similarly intense and explosive, is a yet more ambitious work in which the polyphony becomes so complex that two conductors are required. From nervy, obsessive figuration to ironic repose and surging climaxes, the orchestra plays with a force redolent of compressed Mahler. Jaan Ots joins a well-honed team for a nuanced yet overwhelming rendition, linear pathways always clear despite the welter of sound. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

Beethoven

Violin Concerto; Romances

Midori (violin); Festival Strings, Lucerne/Daniel Dodds *Warner Classics 9029517920 56:08 mins*



Beethoven only completed his Violin Concerto in a rush on the eve of its first performance in 1806 – the disorder of the manuscript has to be seen to be

Concerto Reviews

believed. Not surprisingly, what must have been a virtually sight-read premiere was coolly received and the concerto took several decades to enter the repertoire. Yet those early listeners may have been puzzled by another characteristic: whatever the passing shadow in the first movement development or the playfulness of the finale, the work is almost uniquely free of Beethoven's trademark dynamism and stress – as though composed against a luminous background of deep, settled serenity – most poetically conveyed in the gentle variation-form slow movement in which time can almost seem to stand still.

This latest recording was made in early March under the ominous threat of COVID-19, but nothing seems to disturb the silvery poise and subtle expressiveness Midori draws from her 1734 Guarnerius violin – once owned by the great Bronislaw Huberman. The Festival Strings Lucerne – which, despite its title includes the full complement of winds and timpani – respond with precision and warmth under the direction of their leader Daniel Dodds, while Beethoven's two delectable Romances, Opp. 40 and 50, are delivered with equal elegance and intimacy in a well-balanced recorded acoustic.

Listeners will have their own favourite recording of the concerto from the many dozens of contrasting great performances released over the last century, but this one is highly recommendable. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Brahms

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15; Four Pieces for Piano, Op. 119

Joseph Moog (piano); Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserlautern/Nicholas Milton Onyx Classics ONYX4214 60:02 mins



Reminding us that this was originally intended to be a purely orchestral symphony, the opening of the D minor Concerto always makes an impact. The thunderous timpani, firm rhythms and controlled tempo augur well in this recording, although I have some doubts about the depth and warmth of the sound. But conductor Nicholas Milton doesn't milk the

espressivo element in the gentle second theme, dovetailing with Joseph Moog's first entry – clear and unfussy, with enough subtle rubato to give the music shape and direction. The pacing is always effective, but there could be a greater dynamic range, with *pianissimos* often too present, and *fortissimos* not opening out enough.

That's rarely a complaint in the *Adagio*, where the muted strings match Moog's limpid tone and hushed playing, and there are some characterful wind solos. I said rarely a complaint: the climax disappoints; that's offset by Moog's affectionate way with the music, especially in the many unaccompanied passages which pepper the movement. The final rondo is light on its feet, allowing the main theme to dance, rather than becoming a relentless stomp, but there could be a greater sense of relaxation in the major-key episodes, to give more contrast to the movement as a whole.

In the Op. 119 pieces the *Adagio* is often so slow as to break up Brahms's long phrases, and the *Andantino* is much more than *un poco agitato*. Moog does capture the skittishness of the third Intermezzo though, and the power of the concluding Rhapsodie, despite some eccentric rubato. A mixed bag. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Mozart

Violin Concertos Nos 1-5

Christoph Koncz (violin); Les Musiciens du Louvre Sony Classical 19439770672 117:26 mins (2 discs)

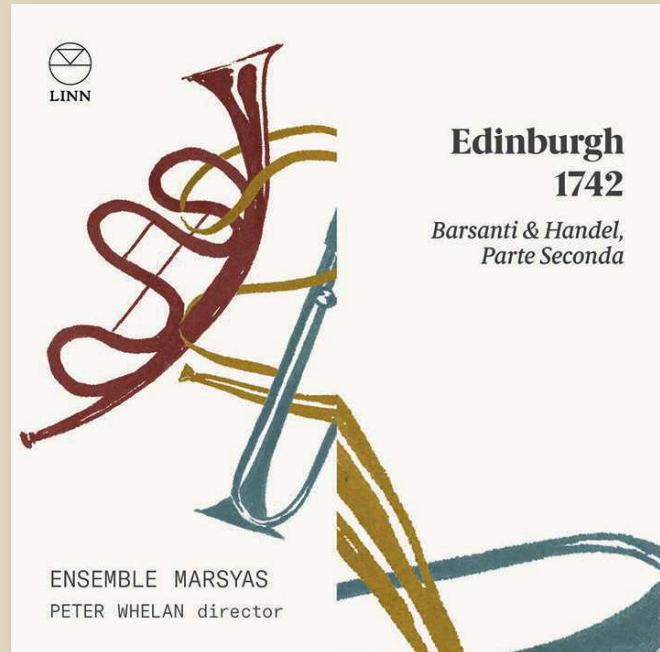


The main point of interest here is that Christoph Koncz uses Mozart's own violin – an early 18th-century Klotz that was passed originally to Mozart's sister, Nannerl, before being sold on variously before arriving at the International Mozart Foundation in 1956. It is a uniquely valuable instrument as (unlike most violins of the period) it didn't receive a 19th-century upgrade and is therefore set up exactly as Mozart left it when he quit Salzburg for Vienna in 1781. Not only that, but it is also the instrument for which the five authenticated concertos were composed and on which Mozart first performed them.



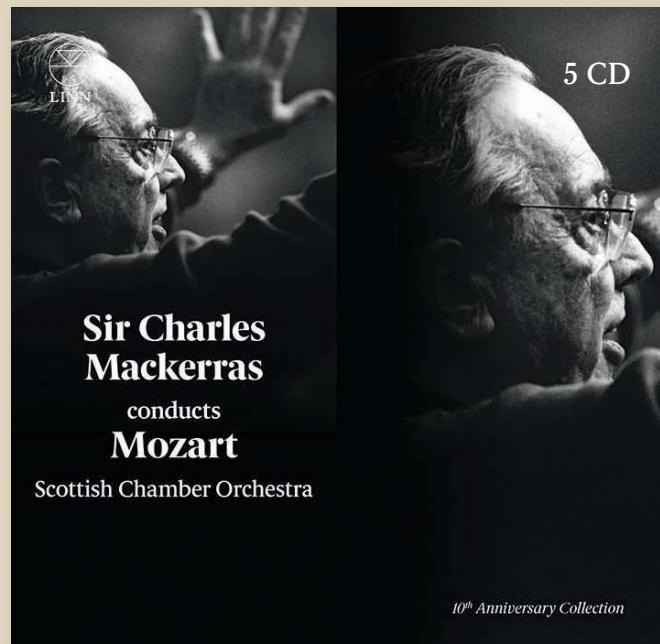
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Ensemble Marsyas and Peter Whelan return to the music of the Italian composer Barsanti.



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Concerto Reviews

Listening to the Klotz in action is to be reminded why so many violinists (orchestral players especially) value provincial German instruments of the 18th and 19th centuries for their smooth, gently veiled and elegant sound. It also helps explain why in his concertos Mozart gives the violin so many opportunities to 'sing' in its upper register, as this is where the Klotz really comes into its own – if you have ever wondered where Mozart got the inspiration for the angelic beauty of K216's central *Adagio*, then this radiant instrument may very well provide the answer.

All of which would have gone for nothing if it were not for Koncz's exquisite sensitivity, not only for Mozart's glowing cantabile but for the special tonal proclivities of the Klotz violin. Even when the notes start flying, as in the *Presto* finale of K207, Koncz does not force his sound in order to create an artificial brilliance, but rather allows the instrument's gently cushioned tone to arise naturally. As an added bonus, Koncz provides his own cadenzas, whose stylistic intuitiveness is such that one might easily assume a set of Mozart's own devising had miraculously come to light. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Novák

Piano Concerto; At Dusk; Toman and the Wood Nymph
Jan Bartoš (piano); Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra/Jakub Hruška
Supraphon SU 42842 62:36 mins



Novák and Suk, after the death of Dvořák with whom both men studied, were very much the leaders in a developing modernism in early 20th-century Czech music. Like Suk, Novák was responsive to French Impressionism and also to the music of Richard Strauss, but unlike Suk, he looked to folksong, mostly Moravian and Slovakian, for inspiration in many of his works. His Piano Concerto, completed in 1895, was written just after his student days. Novák in his maturity called it a 'monstrosity', and seems to have had a certain horror of the many influences apparent in the concerto's musical fabric: Liszt and Dvořák, certainly,

The sound of Mozart:
Christoph Koncz plays the composer's violin



but also Chopin and Grieg. While the musical language is under-baked, there is plenty to enjoy, not least the exquisite end to the first movement. While evidently expert, Jan Bartoš and Jakub Hruška's performance is slightly tentative in the outer movements.

Composed ten years later, *Toman and the Wood Nymph* is far more original and confident than the concerto. The tale on which it is based is that of a young man driven mad by a wood nymph on the perilous night of St John's Eve. Novák described the work as a 'sonic orgy' and it is certainly heady stuff. Hruška and the orchestra respond well to its turbulent passions in a captivating performance with superb recorded sound. Composed a year after the Piano Concerto, the four movements of *At Dusk* for solo piano have greater character and in a performance as committed as that of Jan Bartoš show clear evidence of greatness to come. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Aranjuez

Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez; Sainz de la Maza: Sacrificio; Zapateado; Rondena; El Vito; Tansman: Musique de cour (d'après Robert de Visée); Robert de Visée: Suite in A minor
Thibaut Garcia (guitar); Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse/Ben Glassberg
Erato 9029523571 64:02 mins

Guitarist Thibaut Garcia's third solo album is centred on this bright and driven *Concierto de Aranjuez*, played with a clarity that manages to achieve the shock of the new despite being the world's best known concerto for his instrument. Garcia's great attentiveness to tone and expression marks this out, almost wilfully sprightly in the opening *Allegro con spirito*. It is the *Adagio* which is the eye-opener, however, full of ornament, an expressive vocal mourning played almost as if improvising, not least the cadenza. With the closing *Allegro gentile*, Garcia emphasises the dance-like rhythms of Rodrigo's piece, the stresses, as if meticulously deconstructing the score, cleaning it up and putting it back together again. Ben Glassberg and the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse are thoroughly committed in return.

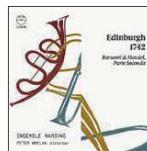
The rest of the recording segues from the lovely fragments by Spanish guitarist and composer Regino Sainz de la Maza (1896–1981) to Alexandre Tansman's *Musique de cour*, a reinvention of the Baroque music of Robert de Visée, and then the real deal, Robert de Visée's Suite in A minor. The richly detailed Tansman (1960) is Baroque reinvented with the gloss of costume drama and full orchestral support. De Visée's own fragments

seem appropriately to pull us back into an earlier time, the orchestra abandoned, leaving simply Garcia and his thoughtfully articulated guitar. *Sarah Urwin Jones*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Edinburgh 1742, Part II

Barsanti: Concerto grosso in C, Op. 3 Nos 6–8; Concerto grosso in D, Op. 3 Nos 9 & 10; A Collection of Old Scots Tunes;
Handel: Atalanta – Overture Ensemble Marsyas/
Peter Whelan (harpsichord)
Linn Records CKD626 51:51 mins



Eighteenth-century Edinburgh's flourishing musical life drew the émigré Italian composer Francesco Barsanti (1690–1775) to settle in 'the Athens of the North' for nigh on a decade. Providing a pendant to their 2017 recording of Barsanti and Handel, Peter Whelan and the Edinburgh-based Ensemble Marsyas here serve up five of Barsanti's concerti grossi together with – by way of an interlude – a medley of *Old Scots Tunes* and Handel's overture to the pastoral opera *Atalanta*.

Barsanti's Op. 3 concerti grossi (published in 1742) are exuberant and felicitous works, faintly Handelian in style (the two men knew each other) but infused to an even greater degree with an airy Italian grace. Movements alternate the stately with the playful, fugues and dances, robust and delicate textures – so building a set of contrasts that are beautifully highlighted by this crack ensemble.

Barsanti has a real flair for orchestral colour, too: flashing trumpets and rollicking timpani offset reedy oboes and muted violins. Director/harpsichordist Peter Whelan coaxes articulate phrasing, buoyant rhythms, and subtly nuanced dynamics from his players, and the ensemble's silvery sound is faithfully captured by Linn's recording engineers.

Into Barsanti's delightful arrangements of traditional Scottish folk melodies, fiddler Colin Scobie and Elizabeth Kenny (Baroque guitar) pour more than a wee dram of Gaelic spirit. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

London circa 1720

- Corelli's Legacy

Babell: Concerto No. 2 for Sixth Flute in D, Op. 3; **Geminiani:** Sonata No. 4, Op. 1; **Handel:** Sonata in G minor, HWV 364b; Admeto - Spera si mio caro bene; **Handel (attrib.):** Concerto a quattro in D minor; **Schickhardt:** Concerto No. 2, Op. 19; Haym Pyrrhus and Demetrius - Thus with My Souls Expiring La Rêveuse/Florence Bolton (viola da gamba), Benjamin Perrot (theorbo) *Harmonia Mundi HMM905322* 60:16 mins



London circa 1720 provides a conspectus of musical taste in Britain, with emphasis on

Corelli's influence during the first half of the 18th century. Advances in printing techniques, along with the impetus provided by amateur music societies, were among the chief propagators of Corelli's music, spearheaded in Britain at least by his greatly admired Op. 5 violin sonatas.

La Rêveuse's off the beaten track programme illustrates the Corellian spin on British taste. Perhaps the most immediately attractive item is a concerto for descant recorder, pitched in D major, by William Babell, included in the composer's Op. 3, c1730. Sébastien Marq plays with refinement, affection and virtuosity, features which enhance every item in the programme. Controversially, perhaps, a *Concerto a Quattro* or more correctly a Sonata for two treble instruments, cello and continuo, has been included in the belief that Handel was its composer. That may be so, as is claimed by one of the surviving manuscripts, but my money is on Telemann, who is nowadays widely considered to be its author. It is a fine piece with an especially alluring opening *Adagio*. The G minor Sonata for viola da gamba and continuo on the other hand is genuine Handel, in which the composer suggested the instrument as an alternative to the violin. Pieces by Geminiani, the most important of the foreign settlers in Britain, apart from Handel himself, Corelli and Johann Christian Schickhardt, as both composer and arranger, contribute to a diverting and thoughtfully prepared programme.

Nicholas Anderson

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★

The Messenger

Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K466*; Fantasia in D minor, K397; Fantasia in C minor, K475; **Silvestrov:** Two Dialogues with Postscript*; **The Messenger - Piano Solo; with Strings***
Hélène Grimaud (piano);
*Camerata Salzburg
DG 483 7853 77:18 mins



Hélène Grimaud's programme brings together the post-modern musings of Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov and Mozart's D minor Piano Concerto – itself flanked by the two solo piano Fantasias, and featuring Beethoven's cadenzas in the outer movements. Silvestrov's *The Messenger* is given in two versions, for strings and synthesiser and for solo piano. The floridly written booklet note has Grimaud offering some insightful thoughts on the music ('For both Mozart and Beethoven, minor keys were suggestive of confrontations with fate or destiny, as opposed to Chopin for whom the minor was expressive of melancholy'). Here the D minor Fantasia, left incomplete by Mozart, features as a solo introduction to the concerto in the same key – an idea that doesn't quite work, partly due to slight differences in sonority and recorded perspective, but you can see why Grimaud had thought it might.

In any case her classy way with the D minor Concerto needs no point-making presentation: her playing combines incisiveness and finesse, with winsome poise also in the slow movement and deftly superb accompaniment by the Camerata Salzburg. A hardening of treble-register piano tone above mid-volume is unfortunately an issue in the two Fantasias, as is Grimaud's close-to-mannered way, in two-handed chords, of bringing down the right hand a shade earlier than the left.

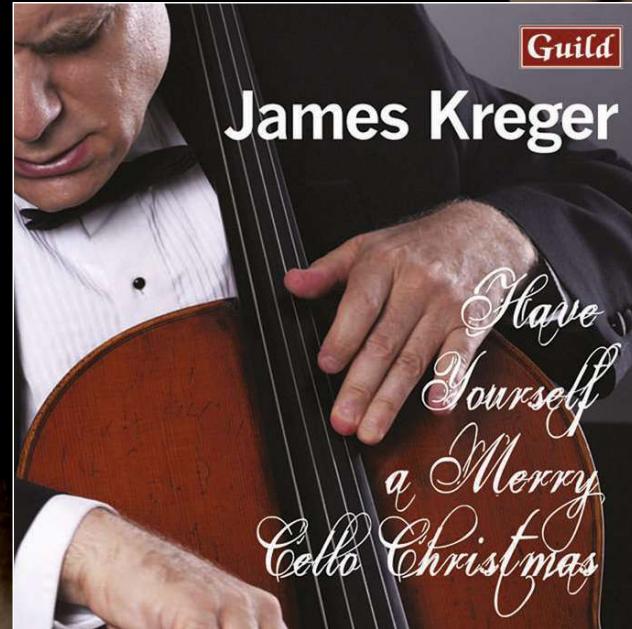
Alongside Mozart's phenomenal inventive resources, Silvestrov's presentation of static pools of sonority, themselves derived from quotations of Mozart, Brahms and other composers, can't help sounding pallid and one-dimensional, beautifully played though they are here. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★

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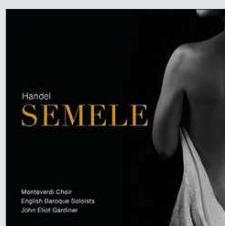
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Opera

OPERA CHOICE



This production of *Semele* is riveting and radical

John Eliot Gardiner goes his own way with Handel's opera, but it remains a must-hear, says *Berta Joncus*



Multifaceted lead: Louise Alder sparkles in the title role

Handel

Semele

Louise Alder, Dan D'Souza, Hugo Hymas, Lucile Richardot, Carlo Vistoli, Gianluca Buratto, Emily Owen, Angela Hicks, Peter Davoren; Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists/John Eliot Gardiner

Soli Deo Gloria SDG733 155:12 mins (3 discs)

Directing this 2019 live performance of *Semele*, John Eliot Gardiner radically altered his approach to music he'd

recorded 40 years earlier. Now Handel's score is all about sex:

Semele, the sultry kitten who dares love Jupiter, sets the mood, which choir and band run with, while jealous wife Juno lashes out. Gardiner correctly reads *Semele* as a story about women, whose passions dwarf Jupiter's inconstant desire.

British soprano Louise Alder is riveting in the title role as she mutates from soft seductress to vain brat to crushed victim, applying a range of styles to develop her character. She starts off with coy French ways – her ornamentation and articulation sparkle in 'With fond desiring' – then, once she has won Jupiter, becomes a preening prima donna, burying

'Myself I shall adore' in her own extemporisations to parade her licence. As Juno, Lucile Richardot's intensity equals Alder's, but with less subtlety. While no doubt electrifying to a live audience, Richardot's repeated gestures of fury – such as biting off line-ends – can become a bit tiresome for the listener at home. Countering her bluster is Hugo Hymas's warm tenderness as Jupiter, and an always-inventive finessing of Handel's dense score by the band and choir.

But Gardiner unaccountably compromises the drama and Handel's wishes. He assigns the celebrated air 'Endless

pleasure', not, as Handel directed, to Semele, but (as in the libretto's c1705 source) to a minor character, and also re-instates arias that Handel deleted. Despite Gardiner's caprices, this *Semele* production is gorgeous, and among the best ever.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING



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Arnold

The Dancing Master

Eleanor Dennis, Catherine Carby, Mark Wilde, Ed Lyon, Fiona Kimm, Graeme Broadbent; BBC Concert Orchestra/John Andrews

Resonus Classics RES10269 75:30 mins



Despite – or perhaps because of – his burgeoning success as a film composer,

Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006) enjoyed scant approval from the snobby postwar British cultural establishment. *The Dancing Master* (1952, librettist Joe Mendoza), originally intended for television, was his second opera to be rejected, this time after completion. Dubbed 'too bawdy for family audiences', the one-act satire, based on William Wycherley's Restoration play, lay unseen until a 1962 amateur production with piano.

Time may have rendered its bawdiness quaint – and wider social politics suspect – but this premiere recording from conductor John Andrews, a vivacious cast and BBC Concert Orchestra is dollops of fun, and more besides. Arnold's inventive, eclectic score is vividly brought to life as Miranda (Eleanor Dennis) and her scheming maid Prue (Catherine Carby) outsmart the pseudo-Spanish father (Graeme Broadbent) and chastity-policing aunt (Fiona Kimm) who would marry her to a 'Frenchified fop' (Mark Wilde). Instead, the so-called 'dancing master' (Ed Lyon) prevails amidst a riot of mistaken identities, kissing and jumping in and out of windows.

The caricatures are loud and ludicrous – and Arnold spares no one, with a frequent bi-tonality that seems at times designed to fox the singers. But they and the orchestra rise wonderfully to the challenge, and locate with affection the melodic tenderness that lies within the score. From the big, bold opening that segues into a *St Trinian's* helter-skelter to cod-verismo – and even perhaps a nod to *Meistersinger* in the suitors' comically contrasting poetic offerings – this is no dismissible pastiche, but a seriously worthwhile addition to the repertoire.

Steph Power

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING



Mozart

Magic Mozart: Arias from *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*, etc

Sandrine Piau, Jodie Devos (soprano), Lea Desandre (mezzo-soprano), Stanislas de Barbeyrac, Loïc Félix (tenor), Florian Sempey (baritone); Insula Orchestra/Laurence Equilbey

Erato 9029526197 71:17 mins



Here's an engaging introduction to sparkling gems from Mozart's operas. The booklet explains,

with some dubious stereotyping, that the 'magic' in the title refers to three types: 'black' magic (the Queen of the Night, Don Giovanni, etc), 'white' benign magic (Papageno, Barbarina, etc) and the 'red' magic of passion (*Figaro*'s Countess, Cherubino, etc). To these we should add the magic of Mozart's genius as three of the items – from *Gallimathias Musicum*, *Bastien und Bastienne*, and *La finta semplice* – were written by the time he was 12.

Jodie Devos's agile soprano is both bright and menacing in the famous Queen of the Night set piece, though in one of Mozart's loveliest arias, 'Vorrei Spiegarvi', the tenderness is slightly masked. Sandrine Piau, of course, is immensely experienced and it is good to hear her now in the role of the Countess from *Figaro* where she is affecting (though her trills can be somewhat impressionistic). The revelation here is the young mezzo Lea Desandre, who gives sparkling accounts of Cherubino's music, and of Mozart's 'Cat duet', 'Nun liebes Weibchen', discovered only in 1996. The two tenors, Stanislas de Barbeyrac and

Loïc Félix, are nicely contrasted (the former a light, expressive Tamino, the latter a spirited conveyor of the sword fight in *La finta semplice*), and the bass Florian Sempey is robust and comical by turn. The orchestra, under the very musical guidance of Laurence Equilbey, is wonderfully alert and stylish throughout.

Anthony Prysor

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Vivaldi

Il Tamerlano

Bruno Taddia, Filippo Mineccia, Delphine Galou, Sophie Rennert, Marina de Liso; Accademia Bizantina/Ottavio Dantone

Naïve OP7080 155:19 mins (3 discs)



Ideas about the sole authorship of a work don't necessarily apply to Baroque opera. It is impossible to be certain how much of *Il Tamerlano*, first performed at the Accademia Filarmonica of Verona in 1735 with a libretto by Agostino Piovane, was actually composed by Antonio Vivaldi. Perhaps the opening Sinfonia and the magnificent quartet that ends Act II, possibly the music for the vanquished Ottoman Sultan Bajazet and his daughter Asteria promised to Andronico but desired by the tyrant Tamerlano. Elsewhere Vivaldi recycled his own arias and borrowed music associated with, among others, that star of the age Farinelli to 'big-up' his own lead singers.

And yet this musical collage sounds unmistakeably Vivaldian. The stabbing chords for the strings that launch the Sinfonia, the unexpected chromatic slips, the

Baroque pleasure:
Ottavio Dantone
conducts Vivaldi



careful word-painting and above all the care with which each aria is shaped around the singer's voice. Astarias's Act I aria 'Amare un'alma ingrata', for example, with its slow introduction, and percussive bass chords underpinning a melodic line that lets the voice lead and the singer luxuriate in her own pain.

If the countertenor Filippo Mineccia's Tamerlano with a thrilling drop into the chest register is *primus inter pares*, then Sophie Rennert as Irene his rejected bride and Delphine Galou's Asteria match him. And the soprano Marina de Liso is magnificently equivocating as Andronico, ready to lose a world for love. Ottavio Dantone directs the Accademia Bizantina through three acts of unalloyed delight.

Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Wagner

Träume – Arias from *Die Feen*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Siegfried*; *Wesendonck-Lieder*

Jenifa Gleich (soprano); BBC National Orchestra of Wales/ Fabrice Bollon

Stone Records 5060192781038 59:15 mins



The Wagner arias in this recital are anything but the familiar calling cards from a singer looking to make her mark. It was courageous of the American soprano Jenifa

Gleich to begin with Ada's aria 'Weh' mir, so nah' die furchterliche Stunde' from *Die Feen*. It's a hugely demanding number from a young composer determined to storm the operatic heights, but Gleich has the measure of its vocal scale. However, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Fabrice Bollon seem intent on breaking the land speed record as they race through Ada's distress.

Gleich's account of Senta's ballad makes you want to hear her sing the role on stage; she has the true measure of Senta's capacity for self dramatisation as she dreams of the Dutchman. Elizabeth's two arias from *Tannhäuser* are handsome enough, though once again in 'Dich Teure Hall' the orchestra seem in a hurry to get their hats and coats on.

It's a brave young soprano who chooses the *Wesendonck-Lieder* for her first recorded Wagnerian outing, with competitors at every fence and with very great performances from Flagstad and Ludwig to Nina Stemme and Susan Bullock leading the field. Yet Gleich takes the orchestral version of these five lieder in her stride. The best of them is 'Träume' to which she brings all her skills as a *bel canto*-trained singer to Wagner's languorous musical line. 'Im Treibhaus' is well done too, even if a little closely miked for comfort, and you forgive a slightly hesitant start to 'Der Engel'. Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★



BACKGROUND TO...

Jenifa Gleich (soprano)

Born in the United States to a Jewish family and brought up on Long Island, Jenifa Gleich was inspired to study singing by a recording of Maria Callas. After lessons with Maria Caruso Farnsworth, Gleich began her career singing dramatic *bel canto* roles, and moved to Florence specially to study Italian. The repertoire proved ideal preparation for Wagner, whose music

requires tremendous breath control and long phrasing. Gleich made her Wagner debut in Longborough Festival Opera's *Ring Cycle* in 2013. Now a dramatic high soprano, Gleich specialises in Wagnerian heroines.

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE



A bewitching journey in songs familiar and new

Soprano Fatma Said breaks new ground with this compelling debut collection, says *Natasha Loges*



New light:
Fatma Said proves to
be an imaginative artist

El Nour

Ravel: Shéhérazade; Lorca: Canciones españolas antiguas – selection; plus songs by Abdel-Rahim, Berlioz, Bizet, Darwish, Falla, Serrano et al

Fatma Said (soprano), Malcolm Martineau (piano), Rafael Aguirre (guitar), et al; Vision String Quartet *Warner Classics 9029523360 64:57 mins*

Exciting things are afoot in the restrained world of art-song. Egyptian soprano Fatma Said's recital combines repertoire by familiar figures (Ravel, Berlioz) with those new to many: Gamal Abdel-Rahim, Najib Hankash, Sayed Darwish, Elias Rahbani and Dawood

Hosni. Liner notes translated into Arabic underline Said's desire to cross borders. Clever arrangements allow us to encounter shared visions across France, Spain and North Africa. Just as the Egyptian songs are mostly presented with typically Western instrumentations, the Western songs are performed with added Middle Eastern instruments, in what Said describes as a 'very fine balance between authenticity and innovation'. There's no tacky Orientalism here.

The breathy, soft-voiced *ney* (a Middle Eastern flute) brings magic to the sound. Falla's *Tus ojos negros* is

This recital has a rare combination of innovation and appeal

so seductive, listeners will swoon, even more so as they slide into Serrano's sublime *canción 'Marinela, Marinela'*, sensitively accompanied by Rafael Aguirre on the guitar. Berlioz with castanets is a nice contrast.

The Egyptian songs are clustered at the end. Abdel-Rahim's *Ana bent el sultan* is huge fun, offering an Arabic soundscape with modernist touches. Hankash's *Aatini Al Naya Wa Ghanni* treats themes of poverty, injustice and faith. Darwish, who was poisoned by British occupying forces and died aged 31, composed 260 songs and various operettas; his style is conveyed in an attractive arrangement. It's an appealing

soundworld, produced to the highest standards with confidence and imagination.

Recitals which combine innovation and appeal at this standard are a rarity. This is one to give all your friends.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★

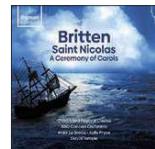
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Britten

Saint Nicolas*

A Ceremony of Carols**

*Marc le Brocq (tenor), **Sally Pryce (harp); Coldfall Primary School Choir; Crouch End Festival Chorus; BBC Concert Orchestra/David Temple *Signum Classics SIGCD649 71:12 mins*



Here at last is a *St Nicolas* that offers a real alternative to Matthew Best's superb Hyperion

recording. Tenor Mark Le Brocq is a fine sounding Nicolas: at his commanding best in the saint's opening address, he also uses a fine lyric tone, most effectively for 'and love was satisfied'. Admittedly, Best's excellent if lighter-voiced Anthony Rolfe Johnson is yet more sensitive to the dynamic inflections of 'O God! We are all weak'.

Temple's excellent choirs include a winningly enthusiastic children's choir (making Best's sound positively reticent). The Crouch End Festival Chorus are characterful, though its women, while fresh voiced, are more mature than the 'breathy' adolescent girls Britten originally wrote for (and rather mischievously assigned the role of 'Winds and tempests!'); yet their response as mothers to the piping voices of the Three Small Boys is a truly heart-catching moment.

A Ceremony of Carols, originally intended for women's voices, suits them well. They do not match the technical polish of the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge (Hyperion), but demonstrate a keener response to the texts, as in 'There is no rose', and show no shortage of vigour in 'Deo gratias'. Harpist Sally Pryce plays beautifully, though the rapt Interlude ends with an incorrect note. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Osvaldo Golijov

Falling Out of Time

Silkroad Ensemble, et al
In A Circle ICRO17 78:26 mins



The Silkroad Ensemble has drawn on an ever-evolving roster of musicians to explore human connection through musical fusion. Their latest venture is a new work

by Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov, *Falling Out of Time*, based on the 2014 book of the same title by Israeli writer David Grossman. Grossman's mesmeric text explores the author's agony at losing his child in the 2006 Lebanon war and recasts his personal experience of grief as a myth-like tale. In collaboration with Grossman and the ensemble, Golijov has created an affecting and adventurous new work which he describes as an 'epic lament'.

Written for three vocalists and a chamber ensemble which includes Iranian *kamancheh* (bowed fiddle), Chinese *pipa* (plucked lute), flugelhorn and drum kit, Golijov's score draws on styles as diverse as the ballads of Central Asia and the early Delta Blues. The piece is understandably dark in tone, and the combination of this intensity of mood, the score's often dense textures and a heavily produced sound at times feels overwhelming. Passages where the texture is stripped down and solo instruments have more breathing space are the most rewarding, including 'Fly' where violin and *kamancheh* twist and weave across a gentle drone, and 'Walking' where vocalists Wu Tong and Nora Fischer bring hushed intensity to Grossman's hypnotic text. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Handel

Messiah

Julia Doyle (soprano), Tim Mead (countertenor), Thomas Hobbs (tenor), Roderick Williams (baritone); RIAS Kammerchor Berlin; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Justin Doyle *Pentatone PTC5186853*

134:30 mins (2 discs)



Crisp, cool and deftly delivered, this *Messiah* is from a 2020 New Year's Day concert – a provenance

hidden in the accompanying notes. Seasoned British *Messiah* performers joined the RIAS Kammerchor and the Akademie für Alte Musik in Berlin for the occasion. Justin Doyle's stated aim was to recapture the intimacy of the work's premiere in Dublin in 1742. Not that he used that version's score; rather, he gave vocal soloists space to extemporise, kept a tight rein on the Kammerchor's volume levels and exacted all he could from the band. But Berlin audiences wanted *Messiah* as they had known it, and ultimately the musicians delivered.

Doyle's direction is assured. In the densest counterpoint, he makes voicing crystal clear; in choruses especially, he picks out and animates dance meters; his silky transitions between solo and choir movements give the performance an irresistible momentum. The vocal artists also show flair. Roderick Williams earns special mention for his thrilling additions to 'The trumpet shall sound', and countertenor Tim Mead illuminates his part through intense declamation. Tenor Thomas Hobbs is warmly engaging, although technically a bit more laboured than his fellow principals. The band is ebullient and assured, relishing Doyle's swift tempos. But unlike the vocal principals, the players are cautious, sticking to standard forms of realisation and *obbligato* execution. Like the band, the Kammerchor is nimble, sweet-toned and polished – with ensemble and diction to rival that of

Hallelujah!:
Justin Doyle delivers
an assured *Messiah*



any professional English choir – but its climaxes are muted. This *Messiah* is beautiful, but not quite sublime. *Berta Joncus*

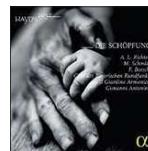
PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Haydn

The Creation

Anna Lucia Richter (soprano), Maximilian Schmitt (tenor), Florian Boesch (baritone); Bavarian Radio Choir; Il Giardino Armonico/ Giovanni Antonini

Alpha Classics ALPHA567
99:19 mins (2 discs)



The Creation wasn't Haydn's last large-scale masterpiece (*The Seasons* and four of his late masses

were still to come), but it seems to have been planned from the outset as the crowning achievement of his long career. The swirling mists of the opening 'Representation of Chaos', and the famous C major outburst on the words 'And there was light', were moments that he never surpassed. In a good performance such as this new one with Giovanni Antonini conducting the ensemble he founded some 35 years ago, *The Creation* remains an indelible experience. Antonini has a fine line-up of soloists, and they clearly enjoy themselves: the soprano Anna Lucia Richter and the tenor Maximilian Schmidt both have attractively light-toned voices, and Richter's discreet embellishments are unfailingly musical; while the

relish with which Florian Boesch intones a bottom D for the depiction of the slithering worm gets a quiet titter of laughter from the otherwise discreet audience.

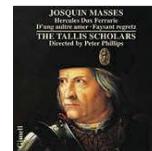
Antonini handles such moments as the sunrise – essentially an ascending D major scale harmonised with extraordinary resourcefulness – very effectively; but the rising of the moon that follows isn't quite mysterious enough. Haydn specifically instructs the harpsichord not to play during the latter passage, so that the music can be as hushed as possible. It would have been nice to have had a more imposing body of voices for the Handelian choruses, but the Bavarian Radio Choir acquires itself very well nevertheless. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Josquin

Massa Hercules Dux Ferrarie; Massa D'ung autre amer; Massa Faysant regretz

The Tallis Scholars/Peter Phillips *Gimell CDGIM051* 71:14 mins



With this almost valedictory recording, The Tallis Scholars complete their monumental nine-disc project to record all of Josquin's Mass settings, and their journey concludes with three aptly monumental works: the *Massa Hercules Dux Ferrarie*, into which Josquin 'chisels' the name of his patron (Ercole, Duke of Ferrara),



BACKGROUND TO... Osvaldo Golijov (b1960)

Born in La Plata, Argentina to Romanian-Jewish immigrants, Golijov's earliest musical influences were Jewish liturgical and klezmer music, and the tangos of Piazzolla. After initial piano studies, Golijov moved to Jerusalem where he studied composition under Mark Kopytman. He then moved to the United States where he studied under George Crumb in Pennsylvania.

He had a long association with the soprano Dawn Upshaw, and wrote several works for her including his first opera *Ainadamar* (2003). He now teaches at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Choral & Song Reviews

and two masses based on French chansons – *D'ung autre amer* and *Faysant regretz*.

Phillips's reading of the Ferrarese work is fluid and supple, and there's a gentle momentum even in the more contemplative sections, such as the hushed *Sanctus* or the sublime *Agnus Dei*. The Scholars' sound is lean and clear: every strand of the musical web is beautifully illuminated, and the text is carved with a sculptural sharpness, allowing the *Hercules Dux Ferrarie* motif (based on the vowels of Ercole's Latinised name) to stand in high relief. Even in the fuller passages, the effect is never mushy – thanks, also, to Gimell's limpid recording in the silvery acoustic of Merton College Chapel, Oxford.

The text is to the forefront, too, in the Scholars' account of Josquin's *Missa D'ung autre amer* – a liquid and melancholy setting inspired by Ockeghem's hauntingly wistful song. Its prayerful *Credo* is so articulately uttered here that the words seem more spoken than sung, while the *Benedictus* motet 'Tu solus qui facis mirabilia' is voiced with prayerful solemnity. The disc's final work, the *Missa Faysant regretz*, is based on a four-note motif that Josquin repeats and reworks to obsessional effect, making a mesmerising final chapter to this unforgettable musical odyssey. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Sarah Kirkland Snider

Mass for the Endangered

Katie Bedford (flute), Amy McKean (oboe), Paul Boyce (bassoon), Jake Brown (percussion), Sally Pryce (harp), John Reid (piano), Martin Gwilym-Jones (violin), Sarah Roberts (viola), Sarah McMahon (cello); Gallicantus/Gabriel Crouch *Nonesuch 7559792005* 42:23 mins



American composer Sarah Kirkland Snider's vibrant, genre-bending works traverse the

worlds of contemporary classical music, folk, pop and indie rock. *Mass for the Endangered* (2018) is Snider's first large-scale choral work and boldly reimagines the Catholic liturgical mass as an elegy for nature. With a libretto (by Snider's longstanding collaborator Nathaniel Bellow) which weaves in amongst the text of the Catholic Mass, the



Josquin odyssey:
The Tallis Scholars
end a long cycle

lining to this COVID world, look no further. And may it be the first of many! *Roger Nichols*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Sing, Precious Music

Works by Appleby, McKie, Stainer, J Sheppard, Tomkins, Roderick Williams, et al
Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford/ Mark Williams
Opus Arte OACD9046D 76:45 mins



The Chapel of Magdalen College, Oxford has boasted a choir for nigh on five and a

half centuries; and, recorded in the Chapel of Merton, this eclectic love letter to itself tracks a snapshot of Magdalen musicians through time stretching back to Thomas Appleby who was appointed Informator Choristarum in 1539. Some, such as Appleby's successor John Sheppard, or Thomas Tomkins, are well known. Others are perhaps more familiar, if at all, in 'Choirs and Places where they Sing'. And in his desire to present a well-rounded picture, the current Informator Choristarum, Mark Williams, has assembled some curious choices. William McKie's 'We wait for Thy loving kindness' makes for an effective introit, whilst Stainer's stalwart 'I saw the Lord' ensures a grandiose Victorian valediction; but in between, not all the music rises to the sublime level of Sheppard's 'Kyrie Lux et Origo', (Williams's reading a thing of richly compelling fulgence).

On the evidence of 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge', Handel's friend William Hayes seems to have been a competent-enough composer though not overly inspired; and although John Varley Roberts might have ushered in a golden age as choral director (so opined Sir Thomas Beecham), his setting of 'Seek ye the Lord' is saccharine and vacuously derivative. Powerful correctives are Matthew Martin's 'Hymn to St Etheldreda' with its dramatic organ interjections, and John Harper's double choir 'Salve Regina', a deftly impassioned setting – both beneficiaries of the choir's bright treble line and the Clerks' ability to modulate their vocal testosterone. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

work 'takes the Mass's musical modes of spiritual contemplation and applies them to concern for non-human life – animals, plants and the environment'.

Snider's lucid score is at once powerful and delicate. Written for choir and chamber ensemble, the work draws less overtly on the 'vernacular' vocal styles that infuse some of her earlier works, but instead finds Snider immersed in memories of singing 'the Mozart, Brahms and Fauré Requiems along with the Palestrina and Byrd Masses, the Bach chorales' as a student – influences which ripple alongside minimalist loops, striking harmonies and imaginative use of texture. Highlights include the meditative *Gloria*, where ethereal upper voices float above flowing harp counterpoint that is as intricate and exquisite as a spider's web, and the *Credo* ('We believe in stone and moss, sand and grass') which has an almost cinematic feel with its swell of radiant, overlapping vocal lines.

Vocal ensemble Gallicantus brings vigour, colour and absolute clarity to the score, while the instrumental playing is top notch throughout. This is a luminous and arresting disc that conveys its urgent ecological message with power and beauty. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Le Chanteur

Songs by Donadel, Glanzberg, Heyral, Himmel, Kosma etc

Roberto Alagna (tenor), Aleksandra Kurzak (soprano); various musicians *Sony Classical 19439790592* 44:18 mins



A Sunday in a music studio in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. It's full of people: technicians,

13 instrumentalists and their supporters, the tenor Roberto Alagna, his wife, two daughters and grandson. And somehow, amid the friendly whirl, they manage in that one day to lay down 15 tracks of popular songs – Jacques Brel, Joseph Kosma, Django Reinhardt and others I've never heard of. But if the atmosphere is 'décontractée', there's nothing remotely casual or amateurish about the artistry.

Classical singers in general are wise to approach popular music with caution. It's a field with its own rules and habits, and it's easy for those unversed in these to sound unconvincing or, worse still, dull. Alagna, though, makes light of such things – while his mother initiated him as a boy into opera, popular music was the delight of his father. In short, this is an utterly enchanting disc.

Alagna understands the looser rhythms of the style, often with early entries, and of course slides. And (oh joy!) we can hear every word, many of them not in the eccentric liner notes. Variety comes from different combinations of instrumentalists, including some staggering riffs from clarinet and trumpet in 'Bohémienne aux grands yeux noirs', as well as from effortlessly beautiful contributions elsewhere by Alagna's two daughters. He'd been wanting to record this repertoire for years, only his agent always had an opera in view. If you're looking for a silver

CHAMBER CHOICE



This set of Beethoven trios has personality and colour

Erica Jeal enjoys the vibrant energy and nuance in these outstanding performances by the Smetana Trio

Perfect partners:
Smetana Trio displays
a seamless blend



Beethoven

Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 1 No. 3;
Piano Trio in D, Op. 70 No. 1 'Ghost';
Piano Trio in E flat, Op. 70 No. 2;
Piano Trio in B flat, Op. 97 'Archduke'

Smetana Trio

Supraphon SU42882 132:05 mins (2 discs)

Even in 2020's crowded field of Beethoven recordings, this one by the Smetana Trio stands out. Their double album frames the familiar *Archduke* and *Ghost* Trios with the Op. 1 No. 3 and Op. 70 No. 2, and all four works come across with vibrant, persuasive energy in the warm but clean acoustic of the studio.

From its deceptively gentle introduction onwards, the opening movement of Op. 1 No. 3 has a weight to its tempo that keeps it swinging like a pendulum, and the closing movement has more urgency and turmoil than many groups would be able to fit into its relatively conventional rondo structure. The beginning of the *Archduke* is dreamier than some – Jitka Čechová's gently pulsing piano accompaniment here and elsewhere can sound mysterious and

modern – allowing room to grow into jubilation at the end of the first section.

Čechová can be suave one moment, kittenish the next; indeed, from the heightened colours and contrasts of the *Ghost* Trio's slow movement to the blanched, church-like tone of the call-and-response passages in Op. 70 No. 2's third movement, all three musicians bring plenty of personality.

The truly striking thing is how seamlessly they work together. Jan Talich's violin tone can be velvety and almost viola-like, meaning he shares a genuine tonal middle ground with Jitka Čechová's cello; this in turn acts as a springboard for Čechová's tonal nuance. It all makes for an extensive colour palette, imaginatively applied but never overdone in these exuberant and hugely enjoyable performances.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING



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Beethoven

Violin Sonatas Nos 1-4

Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin), Martin Helmchen (piano)
BIS BIS-2517 (CD/SACD) 72:40 mins



Inspired by the great violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, Beethoven's first three violin

sonatas were early adumbrations of his mature style. They were not universally admired. The reviewer in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, who played them 'diligently and intently', wrote that he felt like someone who set out for a pleasurable walk through an attractive wood with a genial companion, but emerged 'tired and exhausted, without joy. Erudite, erudite, and ever more erudite – and no nature, no song!'

Yet how elegantly unforced these works come over today. Zimmermann's sound is light, flexible, and finely shaded, with Martin Helmchen delivering effortless virtuosity. The opening of the First Sonata brings an unleashing of exuberant energy, while the opening of the Second is the epitome of mercurial high spirits. The *Adagio* of the Third is grace incarnate, and the ebullient *Rondo* reflects Beethoven's Houdini-like ability to get into and out of conventional tonal procedures. In the Fourth Sonata – closely related to the 'Spring' Sonata – we sense the emergence of both Beethoven's muscular playfulness and the heroic mode to come. These recordings are conversations by a perfect instrumental pairing.

Michael Church

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING



Brahms • Fauré • Schubert

Brahms: Piano Trio No. 1 in B, Op. 8;

Fauré: Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 120;

Schubert: Notturno in E flat, D897

Trio Isimsiz

Rubicon RCD1048 67:46 mins



Trio Isimsiz's second release is ostensibly a set of three 'late' works for piano trio, although late is a relative term when death comes at the age of 31, as it did for



Passionate playing:
Trio Isimsiz performs
exquisite Schubert

Schubert. But it is Fauré that leads us in, truly late, in that he wrote his only piano trio at the age of 78, but possessing a progressive bent to its maturity that suggests youth is simply a frame of mind. Fauré's D minor Trio is understated, both in the writing and the playing, from the tangled opening, the growing notion of perpetual motion, then the subtly striking harmonies of the lyrical *Andantino*.

The opening to Schubert's Nocturne in E flat major is whisperingly exquisite, a remarkable synthesis between the strings, tender, beautifully shaped, before the more abrasively intense middle section. When the original melody returns, it seems spikier than before, as if it cannot settle. By the time we reach the end of this short work, which has been mooted as a discarded *Adagio* to one of Schubert's two piano trios, it is a subtly changed piece.

There's something of the lullaby about the opening theme of Brahms's Piano Trio No. 1 in B major – after all, he was barely out of the cradle when he first wrote it. His elder self, at 57 years, scythed some of the runaway excesses of his 21-year-old youth, as if in gentle admonishment, and it is all played with tender and impassioned commitment here, the opening to the third movement *Adagio* exquisite. *Sarah Urwin Jones*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Felix Mendelssohn

Cello Sonatas Nos 1 & 2; Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 49*

*Marten Root (flute), Viola de Hoog (cello), Mikayel Balyan (piano)
Vivat VIVAT120 76:54 mins



In this new recording of the D minor Piano Trio, the first 16 bars of cello melody accompanied by a quietly agitated piano part sounds reassuringly familiar. The surprise comes in bar 17, where a flute instead of the violin comes in. It was Mendelssohn's London publishers who insisted that a flute arrangement was a *sine qua non* for the English market. Mendelssohn thought the cool sound of the wind instrument unsuited to the passionate intensity of the outer movements, and suggested limiting the transcription to the *Andante* and *Scherzo*; but he was persuaded to supply a flute part for the whole trio. Most of the changes he made involved shifting the original violin part up by an octave, but that would have spoiled the murmuring effect at the end of the slow movement; and since some of the violin's notes there lay below the flute's range, Mendelssohn had to rewrite the passage. As a curiosity, the flute version is worth hearing, and Marten Root makes a fine job of it, but it's hardly a convincing substitute for the original.

Viola de Hoog is persuasive in Mendelssohn's two cello sonatas, too, though perhaps she's slightly on the reserved side in the dramatic recitatives of the Second Sonata's slow movement, which curiously alternate with the severity of a chorale melody on the piano. The talented Armenian pianist Mikayel Balyan, playing on a light-toned Érard instrument of the kind Mendelssohn himself favoured, offers dazzling virtuosity throughout. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Mozart

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, K478; Piano Quartet No. 2 in E flat, K493; Rondo Concertante in B flat, K333

Benjamin Schmid, Zen Hu (violin), Johannes Erkes (viola), Enrico Bronzi (cello), Dejan Lazić (piano)
Onyx Classics ONYX 4207 71:08 mins



The historical evidence isn't clear as to why, in his two piano quartets, Mozart set about surpassing even his own usual creative level. As the booklet note relates, it may or may not be true that the wondrous range of invention in the G minor Quartet, K478, commissioned as the first of three, so bewildered its first audiences that the rest of the project lapsed. That didn't prevent Mozart composing the E flat Quartet K493 as a follow-up, however, and if anything with even more dazzling results.

Rather as C minor was for Beethoven, G minor for Mozart was a key denoting swirling emotional turbulence. Yet the First Quartet's

idiom is also authentically Classical, and the challenge for its performers – especially when, as here, playing on modern rather than period instruments – is to do justice to the work's cascade of moods and ideas without propelling these, consciously or otherwise, too far towards Beethoven territory.

Dejan Lazić and his string-playing colleagues wonderfully solve this conundrum. Lazić likes to inflect this or that gorgeous phrase a little within the context of the main tempo of the moment, but he does it with an instinctive musicianship that disarms resistance. In the E flat Quartet's sunnier landscape, the central *Larghetto*'s mood of poised dreaminess is exactly captured, and Lazić delivers the piano's virtuoso passagework in the outer movements with sparkling ease. The Rondo finale from the B flat Piano Sonata K333 isn't material in this class, yet Lazić's piano quintet arrangement makes for a likeable encore. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Augusta Read Thomas

The Auditions; Avian Capriccio; Plea for Peace; Ripple Effects; Two Thoughts About The Piano; Selene; Your Kiss

Axiom Brass Quartet; ICE Ensemble; Third Coast Percussion, et al
Nimbus NI6402 78:32 mins



The American composer Augusta Read Thomas has an intense 'voice', with an exceptional ear for timbral detail, clarity and the control of ebb and flow. This compilation,



BACKGROUND TO...

Augusta Read Thomas (b1964)

Born in New York, Augusta Read Thomas is today one of the most frequently performed of living American composers. Among her formative teachers were Oliver Knussen at Tanglewood, Jacob Druckman at Yale University and Paul Patterson at London's Royal Academy of Music. In 1997 she began her association with Chicago Symphony Orchestra and became that ensemble's longest-serving composer in residence, holding the position until 2006. She now teaches at the University of Chicago, where she founded the Center for Contemporary Composition.

the eighth in a series documenting her music, centres on the ballet score *The Auditions*, written for the Martha Graham Dance Company, premiered in 2019: a mystical concept in which cycles of yearning aspiration and ascent seem to admit the protagonists gradually to higher planes of existence. It's tremendously compelling, full of rhythmic sparkle, subtle shades of mood and a brilliant sense of interplay between the intriguing selection of instruments, the only downside being a slight over-reliance on high frequencies, seemingly a recurring feature of Read Thomas's style. Similar issues apply in *Selene* for percussion quartet and wind; but both receive sterling performances, respectively by the ICE Ensemble and Third Coast Percussion.

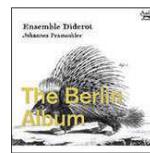
Avian Capriccio is a quirky showpiece of three works for brass quintet, a quirky mix for depicting the likes of hummingbirds or swans. *Ripple Effects* for carillon duet and *Two Thoughts About The Piano* require – as do the other works – exceptional precision; special plaudits are due to the pianist Daniel Pesca. Perhaps the vocal works are ultimately the most touching: a wordless *Plea for Peace*, sung with pure expressiveness by Jessica Aszodi which allows stillness and fervour to shine through, and in 'Your Kiss' the soprano Claire Booth aspires to Read Thomas's stratospheric shining high pitches. The composer carries us with her into another world which, this time, becomes human. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

The Berlin Album

Trio Sonatas by Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia, GA Benda, JG Graun, Janitsch, Kirnberger and JAP Schulz

Johannes Pramsohler (violin); Ensemble Diderot
Audax ADX13726 68:20 mins



It is perhaps noteworthy that this album contains neither a single bar of flute music, nor any contribution from Quantz, CPE Bach and the flute playing Frederick the Great. This is a purely string programme featuring, in all but a single instance pieces which claim world premiere recording



Carnival atmosphere: the Kanneh-Masons play Saint-Saëns

status. Ensemble Diderot has already released Dresden, London and Paris anthologies on this label, and very rewarding they are, too. This newcomer is no exception.

Of especial merit are trio sonatas by the melodrama writing Georg Anton Benda, and Johann Gottlieb Graun, one-time leader of Frederick the Great's orchestra. Their musical invention is lively and plentifully endowed with *galant* gesture. The north German *Empfindsamer Stil* or sensitive style, of which CPE Bach was the master is almost entirely absent from these trios.

A trio sonata by Johann Philipp Kirnberger, a violinist in Frederick's orchestra, strikes a more academic note, perhaps betraying the discipline of his former teacher, JS Bach. A greater rarity here is a short Fugue by Frederick's sister, Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia. Even if she was no more than a competent composer, she recognised the outstanding gifts of CPE Bach and, but for her neatly copied collections of the music of Johann Gottlieb Graun, much of it might have been lost. Trios by Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, who played an important part in the cultivation of the German Lied and Johann Gottlieb Janitsch, a bass player in Frederick's orchestra completes a vibrant picture of chamber musical life in and around the royal Berlin residences. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Carnival of the Animals

Saint-Saëns: Carnival of the Animals; plus works by Bartók, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Grieg, Bob Marley, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Eric Whitacre

Michael Morpurgo, Olivia Colman (narrator); The Kanneh-Masons; various guest musicians
Decca 485 1156 55:24 mins



Carnival of the Animals is beloved by 'children and grown-up children' says Michael Morpurgo in the preamble to this new setting of Saint-Saëns's accidental classic, a work the composer only permitted to be published posthumously for fear it would dilute the impact of his 'serious' music.

Morpurgo has provided verses – written from the perspective of each of the featured protagonists and narrated by the author and Olivia Colman – to correspond to the 14 movements. Like all good children's literature, these light-hearted ponderings belie serious ideas – Colman's hen muses that 'we lay our eggs and they take them away', while the tortoise warns of the importance of 'going slow'.

The Kanneh-Masons are superb, applying a light touch that comes from serious musicianship. Pianist Isata jumps and hops along the keyboard in 'Kangaroo' and, joined

by Konya, glories in the scatlike 'Pianists'. Sheku gets his starring role in 'The Swan', and there are appearances by woodwind wonders Adam Walker and Mark Simpson (a charming cuckoo).

The second selection, *Grandpa Christmas*, describes the love between a granddaughter and grandfather, narrated by Morpurgo and Mariatu, the youngest Kanneh-Mason (aged 11), interspersed by colourful, illustrative pieces such as Grieg's 'Little Bird' (Op. 43 No. 4). *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Rendezvous Leipzig

Maier: String Quartet in A; Smyth: String Quartet in C minor
The Maier Quartet
Db Productions dbCD197 64:40 mins

This recital combines two early works by Amanda Maier and Ethel Smyth. The quartets on this recording were written when both women were in their early 20s; they knew each other in Leipzig. Both were remarkable pioneers – Maier, a fine violinist, was the first Swedish director of music, but marriage and motherhood ended her career and she died aged 41. Smyth, defiantly gay and feminist, had to go on a hunger strike before she was allowed to study music, remained unmarried and enjoyed a long career.

Maier's Quartet in A, composed in 1877, disappeared until the 1990s, when the outer movements were reconstructed by B Tommy Andersson. Her riotous approach to harmony needs more direction and variety in bowing and dynamics. Smyth lost interest in her early Quartet, from 1881, although some material was re-used later.

Both quartets are performed with precision and polish. However, Maier's tremendous imagination needs more wit and lightness, despite being a substantial work. Smyth's early Quartet is somewhat laborious and lengthy, as one might expect from a young composer; the performance is polished but does not redeem the work's shortcomings. Still, it's an informative recording with an attractive, rich sound.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Instrumental

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE



Solo II

JS Bach: Cello Suites Nos 3 & 4;

Kurtág: Signs, Games and Messages

Tabea Zimmermann (viola)

Myrios MYR 026 52:47 mins

The viola player Tabea Zimmermann speculates that Bach's Cello Suites, the third and fourth of which are recorded here, might have been performed on the contemporary violoncello piccolo or the viola da spalla, attached by a strap to the front of the body. Bach himself was not excessively purist when it came to

adapting his works and, when all is said and done, it is the quality of the performing that counts.

Zimmermann's playing is profoundly thoughtful, leading to flawlessly structured readings. Prime examples are the Preludes to both suites: each has an underlying logic illuminating the music's fundamental line of development amid the abundant figuration, resulting in performances of

The performance of the Sarabandes is breathtakingly skilful

great cumulative power. The dance movements are elegant, but not to the exclusion of humour; the Allemandes, Bourrées and Gigues communicate clear earthy enjoyment. Perhaps most remarkable is Zimmermann's breathtakingly skilful performance of the Sarabandes in which the differentiation of detail within a contrapuntal texture sounds almost as if two instruments are playing.

Sandwiched between the Bach suites is a gathering of six pieces by

György Kurtág written for a number of the composer's musical friends. They are highly emotional

in character and fearsomely difficult to play. The contrasts are extreme, ranging from aggression in 'A quarrel chromatically', through elusive delicacy in 'A flower for Tabea' to a richly moving Hungarian 'In nomine' by way of conclusion.

Superbly recorded in a richly resonant ambience, this is an unusual and compelling release.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★



Logic and joy:
Tabea Zimmermann is a compelling performer

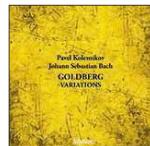
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JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Pavel Kolesnikov (piano)

Hyperion CDA68338 79:16 mins



As you'd expect, there is a huge number of recordings of this supreme masterpiece, ranging from Wanda Landowska's thundering harpsichord, still exciting to listen to, to arrangements for string trio. Pavel Kolesnikov opts for a grand piano, warm and round in tone, and for a limited range of dynamics.

How do you make a worthwhile contribution to the enormous range of performances without sounding

willful or perverse? Kolesnikov opts for a middle way, rather like Wilhelm Kempff two generations ago. The recording is sumptuous, but I listened in vain for some individuality. Oddly, what is most striking is the treatment of the last variation, the 'Quodlibet', which is almost always taken with a grand swagger, a kind of QED before the theme itself is repeated. Kolesnikov makes a point of underplaying it, so that it neither sounds grand nor peaceful. While it would be unfair to say that the performance is inexpressive, it is one of the most straightforward I have heard, so even the famous 'Black Pearl' variation in no way stands out. But Kolesnikov's playing is consistently

lovely, and I would defy anyone not to enjoy it. *Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE

★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

JS Bach

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Vol. 2

Steven Devine (harpsichord)

Resonus RES10261 148:16 mins (2 discs)



As the keyboard cornerstone of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, of the Gonzaga Band and of sundry other period-instrument ensembles, harpsichordist Steven Devine is a discreetly ubiquitous presence.

But he's also building a reputation as an outstanding recitalist; this completion of his '48' is a highly satisfying account.

In the course of his scholarly liner note, Devine observes that he has followed the Kirnberger system of tuning, 'modifying thirds slightly if I felt the listening experience was too sour, but preserving the quarter-comma-tuned fifths as a basis – trying to keep the essential colouration of each key in line with 18th-century aesthetics.' His aim has also been to give his 'particularly beautiful' instrument (made by that consummate craftsman Colin Booth) the chance to sound its best – and in that he has certainly succeeded.

Some musicians play up the kaleidoscopic aspect of this extraordinary collection of pieces, but Devine gives it a strong underlying pulse, with emotional restraint; his playing is invigoratingly muscular, his intention with each piece pellucidly clear, often setting the pairs in fruitful contrast. Prelude No. 5 is ceremoniously celebratory, an effect undercut by its po-faced fugue; the grace of Prelude No. 9 resolves into the marmoreal contours of its fugue; I would have liked Prelude No. 6 to have been more hurtling and impetuous, but its serpentine fugue really does lash its tail. The chromatic Prelude No. 20 is bright and breezy as it examines its theme from every angle, but the fugue comes over as a comically stilted rejoinder. As Bach moves into ever more experimental regions, Devine rigorously keeps pace.

Michael Church

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Dyson

The Open Window: Piano Works

Simon Callaghan,
Cliodna Shanahan (piano)
SOMM Recordings SOMMCD0622-2
101:58 mins (2 discs)



The complete piano music: but not even one sonata, let alone Beethoven's 32. Modest

dimensions, ambitions too, always governed George Dyson's keyboard output, ranging from an untitled morsel of 1890 (he was just seven) to the *Twelve Easy Pieces* of 1952, one of several pedagogical sets intended for young fingers. All this may suggest music of no great significance, music that does indeed occasionally surface during the two discs. Yet even when the fingering is simple and the length very brief, Dyson usually packs in plenty of substance, with tricky rhythms, surprising harmonies that belie his conservative image and considerable authentic charm.

Some of the time, as in the *Open Window* set of 1920, Dyson succeeds in traditional ways, painting vivid musical pictures in pieces entitled 'Gentle Rain', 'Swallows', or 'Passers-by'. The coin's other side emerges in the unorthodox triumph of the decidedly odd *Bach's Birthday*, four little fugues often so tonally



unhinged that we could be listening to a deliberate parody of the Second Viennese School. Other pieces – the pungent *Epigrams* written while soldiering in the Great War, the gracefully atmospheric *Four Twilight Preludes*, meaty character pieces shaped and propelled with concise compositional skill – successfully occupy the middle ground.

Simon Callaghan, a devoted specialist in forgotten British repertoire, tackles this varied fare with aplomb. Cliodna Shanahan joins him for Dyson's not entirely satisfactory two-piano arrangement of the 1951 *Concerto Leggiero*, almost Les Six-ish in its whirling chatter. But the real pleasures of this welcome release lie elsewhere.

Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Philip Glass

Les Enfants Terribles – Suite (arr. Riesman); Etude No. 17*; Etude No. 20**

**Katia & *Marielle Labèque (piano)
DG 485 5097 61:14 mins



Les Enfants Terribles (1996), the final instalment of Philip Glass's chamber opera trilogy based on writings by Jean Cocteau, tells a fantastical, unsettling story of two siblings. Michael Riesman's new arrangement for two pianos was

completed earlier this year and is performed here by the Labèque sisters, who have decades of experience playing music in this vein (eg *Minimalist Dream House*, 2013, also DG). *Les Enfants Terribles* has a strong dance element, and this version recalls the original piano reduction of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (also recorded by the Labèques: *Invocations*, 2016), particularly the gritty percussive effects heard in the overture and 'Paul's End'. Given that the original version of *Les Enfants Terribles* is for three pianos and four voices, it translates well to the medium of just two pianos, and Katia and Marielle take on the work of the missing five colleagues with ease.

Two solo etudes – No. 17 by Marielle and No. 20 by Katia – serve as encores. Claire Jackson

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

R Schumann

Einsam: Arabeske; Kinderszenen; Kreisleriana; Waldszenen, Op. 82 – Vogel als Prophet; Romance, Op. 28/2

Nino Gvetadze (piano)
Challenge Classics CC 72855 66:55 mins



This is, quite simply, gorgeous. Nino Gvetadze plays Schumann's much-loved *Arabeske*, *Kinderszenen* and *Kreisleriana*, as though they flow spontaneously

from her. Time is elastic, liberated from the tyranny of the pulse. Her intensely vocal approach recalls the principles of the Russian piano school, in that distances are measured as though sung, not through the handspan. The lyricism is exquisite, for example in the intimate close of the *Arabeske*. She is also alert to Schumann's harmony, relishing all dissonances, and understanding their relative importance.

Individual pieces showcase Gvetadze's fine control and layering of Schumann's dense textures, creating a three-dimensional impression of the music: for example, in the sublimely guileless 'Träumerei', or 'Fast zu ernst'.

The 'Vogel als Prophet', a single number included from Schumann's *Waldszenen*, is an inspired inclusion, sinister, eldritch and chilling, as is the closing 'Romanze', a Clara Schumann recital favourite.

Gvetadze's Schumann is more 'Eusebius' than 'Florestan' (to recall the composer's self-described introvert and extrovert alter egos). But when fire is needed, she supplies it. Her approach to virtuosity recalls Clara Schumann's teaching principles, eschewing empty passagework for crisp articulation and careful shaping. She can be impish and spiky, as well as emollient and lyrical.

The beautiful piano sound is another pleasure on this recording, full and warm, vocal in quality and balanced across the range. Some listeners may want a clearer pulse, a more evident 'spine' to the music, but I found this a wholly persuasive depiction of a mercurial Schumann, without an aggressive bone in his body. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Good Night!

Lullabies by Alkan, Balakirev, Bonis, Brahms, Busoni, Chopin, Dessner, Grieg, Janáček, Lachenmann, Liszt, Lyapunov, Martínu and Villa-Lobos
Bertrand Chamayou (piano)
Erato 9029524243 55:15 mins



A charm of lullabies, or an excess? If anyone could convince you that mostly slow and soft can work as an album sequence, it would be sonic magician Bertrand

Instrumental Reviews

Chamayou. If the spell for me begins to wane some way before the end, that's not the fault of performer or composers. Within the narrow compass there's profundity, and subtle variety. Janáček's 'Good Night' from *On an Overgrown Path* and the late Liszt *Wiegenlied* may be easy to play, but their harmonic twists are unique to each composer. Chopin's *Berceuse* only shifts from its hypnotic left-hand notes towards the end, yet places transcendental fantasy above them, cueing the more elaborate Lyapunov piece here and Liszt's second version of his *Berceuse*, which sounds improvisational, but not entirely in a good way. Most original are sombre Martinů and Busoni, whose 1909 gem sounds more modern than Bryce Dessner's *Song for Octave*, composed especially for this disc – not necessarily a criticism.

There are surprising departures from the serene norm within the lullabies of Grieg and Balakirev, adding malicious sprites and funeral rites respectively to the nocturnal mix. Chamayou weaves everything together in imagination and aerial delicacy, and I love his liner note, which seems like a challenge to the opening of *In Search of Lost Time*. Certainly this is not a case of Proust's 'my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to say "I'm going to sleep"'; Chamayou is acutely conscious of the semi-wakeful state, and has recorded his personal homage to that effect.

David Nice

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Labyrinth

Beethoven: Bagatelles Op. 126 Nos 4 & 5; Pelz: Repetition Blindness, Chapters I & II; Satie: Pièces froides Nos 2 & 3; Scriabin: Vers la Flamme; plus piano works by CPE Bach, JS Bach, Crumb, Granados, Janáček, Ligeti, Lully, Marais and Rebel

David Greilsammer (piano)
Naïve V7084 67:58 mins



David Greilsammer has form for putting together sequences of apparently

unrelated short pieces to make a concept album. It's a dangerous game: if you don't go along with his inevitably individual choices, the result can seem like



Sweet dreams:
Bertrand Chamayou
performs lullabies

a meal consisting entirely of *hors d'oeuvres*, without ever reaching the main course. Or, as we have here, a selection of sandwiches where two pieces by one composer frame a third from a different era. Sometimes they work, sometimes they jar, which may be the effect Greilsammer wants.

The first sandwich of Janáček and Lully immediately highlights that discontinuity, and it doesn't help that, in the opening 'The owl has not flown away', the performance often lacks clarity and direction. In fact, it's a good indication of Greilsammer's strengths and weaknesses as a pianist, with detail not always well defined in inner parts, and a tendency for louder passages to become hectoring. He's more sensitive in terms of tone and colour in quieter music, and in sparser or more spiky textures. Which means that the piece from Crumb's *Makrokosmos* is effective, although its position between two Beethoven Bagatelles is disconcerting. And the pieces by Ofer Pelz, written especially for this album, with a blatant Janáček quote in the second, show him at his best.

At the centre of the disc is Granados's *El amor y la muerte*, where Spanish warmth never really emerges, but, conversely, the Satie *Pièces froides* which follows isn't cold enough. I'm afraid that I wasn't drawn into Greilsammer's dreamworld. Martin Cotton

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Organ Prom

Works by WG Alcock, JS Bach, Elgar, Handel, Lemare, Rachmaninov, Thalben-Ball, Wagner, Walton and Widor

John Challenger (organ)
Salisbury Cathedral SCA 002 78:09 mins



If John Challenger's programme doesn't exactly win prizes for originality, that was never the point. The clue is in the title. And it's very much an 'occasional' disc, shaking hands with Salisbury's first ever Organ Prom in 2018 which was designed to give the Cathedral's venerable Father Willis instrument a rousing send-off ahead of restoration. Scuppered by coronavirus, the planned 2020 'welcome back' had to be reconfigured as a virtual affair, hence a recording reliving the summer of '18, and glorying in evergreen comforts such as the Bach *Toccata and Fugue*, Elgar's *Nimrod* and, for those with a sweet tooth, Lemare's *Andantino* – better known as 'Moonlight and Roses'.

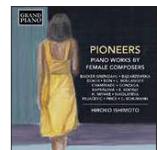
With a nod to the 'Last Night', this Prom is bookended by Walton's *Orb and Sceptre* and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*, both gloriously kaleidoscopic earfuls that show off the organ's colours in all their regal majesty. Challenger is a skilful 'orchestrator' and, compounded by Lemare's reworking of the Prelude to Act III and Bridal March from Wagner's *Lohengrin*,

he negotiates the transcriptions with a lively invention and fluidity. The Bach receives the full 'Grand Guignol' and then some. Perhaps *Nimrod* is dangerously slow, but the Widor Toccata bowls along with disciplined *élan*. A perfect stocking-filler. Paul Riley

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Pioneers

Works by Backer-Grøndahl, A Beach, L Boulanger, Chaminate, E Kodály, Kapralova, F Price, C Schumann, etc
Hiroko Ishimoto (piano)
Grand Piano GP844 74:37 mins



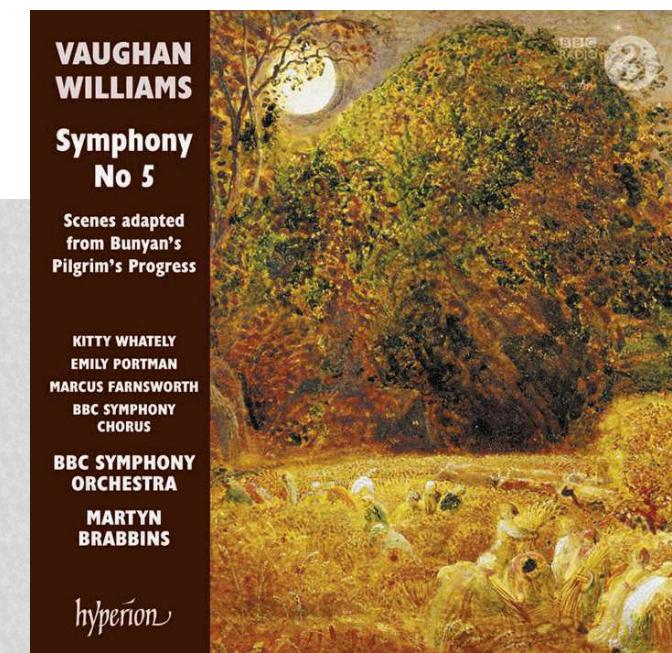
A compilation of music by women 'pioneers' shouldn't be necessary – yet in this wide-ranging and thought-provoking compilation sampling music from the 18th century to the present day, only one work (the Boulanger) has much likelihood of being familiar. Hiroko Ishimoto, a Japanese pianist living in Budapest, is a devoted champion of this repertoire and has assembled an imaginative selection.

The rationale for her choices and their ordering on the disc is not always clear. There's a slight emphasis on quantity of names, represented in short works, rather than a focus on the meatier possibilities: the result is a predominance of flowers, waltzes, musical boxes and so forth, while some composers, such as the renowned Tatiana Nikolayeva, could perhaps have been better represented by more substantial compositions. Some pieces, such as a waltz by Emma Kodály (wife of Zoltan), are somewhat overshadowed by several 20th-century stand-out works, notably a prelude by the astonishing Vitezlava Kapralova, star pupil of Martinů (she died aged 25 in 1940), and one movement of a sonata by Florence Price that leaves one hungry for more. The most recent piece is by the Japanese composer Miyake Haruna – a striking, deconstructed tango.

Ishimoto has a forthright tone and her playing is occasionally rather relentless, but she navigates the varied repertoire with great assurance. The recorded sound is a touch close and loud. Jessica Duchen

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

hyperion



Vaughan Williams's incidental music for 'The Pilgrim's Progress' has seldom been heard in its original guise since the 1906 premiere; yet further reason to acquire an outstanding interpretation of the composer's Symphony No 5.

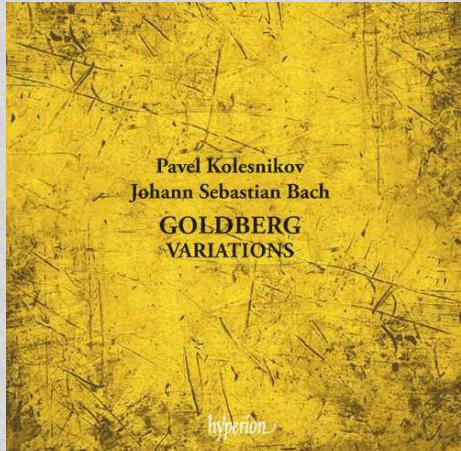
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Vaughan Williams: Symphony No 5 & Scenes adapted from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MARTYN BRABBINS conductor

'Intense, emotional and pure' is how Pavel Kolesnikov described recording this compelling account where the spirit of the dance is never far away.

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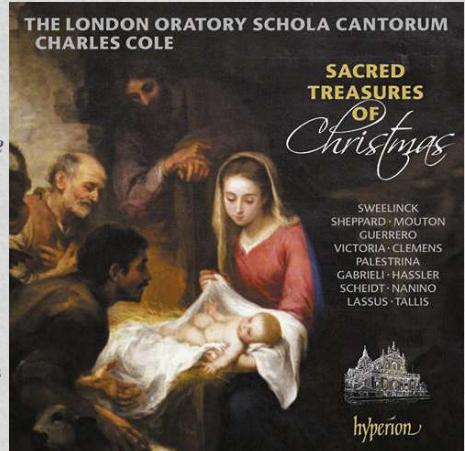
Bach: Goldberg Variations
PAVEL KOLESNIKOV piano



A celebration of Christmas across sixteenth-century Europe: Renaissance polyphony at its finest.

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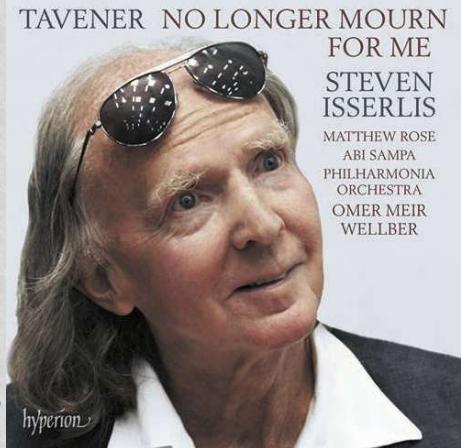
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Brief notes

This month's selection includes masses, ancient stories and festive masterpieces

Bernstein *West Side Story*

Melisma Saxophone Quartet et al
Orchid Classics ORC100145



Despite the well-constructed arrangement for violin and saxophone quartet – forces that should be able to bring vibrancy and zing – this interpretation feels a little too safe. (FP) ★★★

Ketil Björnstad

The Lofoten Oratorio

Marianne Beate Kielland et al
LAWOLWCI202



Folky and fun, this work for voices and small instrumental ensemble takes us through the seasons in the northern Norwegian region of its title. You'll need the English libretto to appreciate the spoken dialogue. (JP) ★★★

Linda Buckley

From Ocean's Floor etc

Crash Ensemble et al *NMCD258*



Buckley's music traverses a fault line between discomfort and great beauty. The works on this album are captivating; I couldn't tear myself away. (MB) ★★★★

Cherubini *Messe solennelle* in D

Stuttgart Chamber Choir *Carus 83.512*



Cherubini is one of the most dramatic voices of the late Classical period and this mass runs the full gamut of emotions, mournful to ecstatic. Fabulous, full-blooded performances, without histrionics creeping in. (OC) ★★★★

Abraham Cupeiro *Pangea*

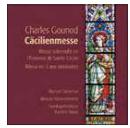
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Warner Classics 9029518167



This cinematic canvas is filled with broad orchestral strokes and instruments from across the continents Cupeiro's works explore. A richly vivid soundworld, if a little bit predictable. (MB) ★★★

Gounod *St Cecilia Mass* etc

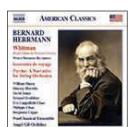
Mainzer Domchor *Rondeau ROP6181*



Gounod's *St Cecilia Mass* is a hearteningly upbeat affair, culminating in a blazing finale. The *Messe brève*, written for the lower voices, is more restrained but worth exploring too. (JP) ★★★

Herrmann *Whitman* etc

PostClassical Ensemble et al
Naxos 8.559883



The 1944 radio play *Whitman* might be the selling point, but Bernard Herrmann's bewitching 1967 Clarinet Quintet stands tallest here. The play's effective score minus dialogue would have been a bonus. (MB) ★★★

Mahler *Symphony No. 7*

Orchestre National de Lille

Alpha Classics ALPHAS592



Conductor Alexandre Bloch gives us a splendidly spiky central *Scherzo* and nicely paced final *Rondo*, but his two *Nachtmusik* movements are not as mysterious as some I've heard. (JP) ★★★

Poulenc *The Story of Babar*

Miriam Margolyes (narrator), Simon Callaghan (piano) *Nimbus NI1571*

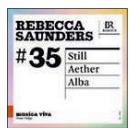


This is short but very sweet; Margolyes's enchanting narration, Poulenc's characterful music and Callaghan's colourful playing are well matched. If only there was more. (MB) ★★★★

Rebecca Saunders

Still; Aether; Alba

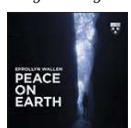
Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra et al *BR Klassik 900635*



Three visceral, experimental works by the brilliant British composer Rebecca Saunders are performed live, with every instrument pushed to its limit. A real experiment with textures and timbres. (FP) ★★★★

Errollyn Wallen *Peace on Earth; See that I am God; Pace*

The Choir of King's College, Cambridge
King's College KGS0050



Errollyn Wallen's choral music – performed here with clarity, precision and care – is truly glorious. It's a constant source of surprise and joy. (FP) ★★★★

Toby Young *Beowulf*

Armonico Consort et al
Signum Classics SIGCD632

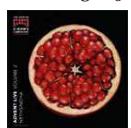


Toby Young has a huge talent for captivating melodies and rhythms, put to excellent use in this wonderful re-telling of the ancient *Beowulf* story complete with compelling narrative. (OC) ★★★★

Advent Live, Vol. 2

Works by Howells, Britten, Wolf et al

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge *Signum Classics SIGCD661*



The fantastic balance of anthems, hymns and organ music leaps out in this arresting, fabulously performed Advent programme from St John's, Cambridge. (OC) ★★★★

American Gifts for Marimba Duo

Works by Roger Sessions et al

Jack Van Geem, Tom Hemphill et al *Bridge BCD9534*



Transcriptions for piano are joined by one specifically for two marimbas by Michael Tilson Thomas. The players' agility is impressive, the transcriptions engagingly effective. (JP) ★★★

American Music for Flute and Piano

Works by Muczynski et al
Olga Leonkiewicz (flute), Kinga Filej-Kubica (piano) *DUX 1596*

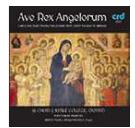


This set of four works is full of contrasts, from the lyrical to the melancholy; pitch-perfect performances from Leonkiewicz and Filej-Kubica, too. A delightful recording. (MB) ★★★★

Ave Rex Angelorum

Carols and Music

Choir of Keble College *CRD 3537*

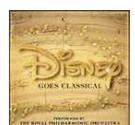


A distinctly darker-hued festive album without much in the way of tinsel and bells, but none the worse for that. The three carols by Keble choirmaster Matthew Martin are the highlight. (JP) ★★★★

Disney Goes Classical

Works by R Newman, Menken et al

RPO Decca *724 4242*



It's what you'd expect – the RPO here displays why it's one of the most versatile outfits around. Smart, rich arrangements of classic tunes from over 50 years of Disney animation played with panache. (OC) ★★★

Flute Sonatas & Solo Works

Works by JS Bach, Kalevi Aho et al

Brandon Patrick George (flute) et al *Profil Hänsler PH18039*



The young American flautist makes his solo recording debut with a nuanced programme. His sound is developed and clear, but would benefit from more focused phrasing. (FP) ★★★

It's Christmas! Carols and Songs

Jonas Kaufmann (tenor) et al

Sony Classical 19439786762



Kaufmann is audibly having fun here, with strong orchestral accompaniment. The dominant German set is rich and chocolatey, the later English items a more sickly-sweet candy. (MB) ★★★

LCO Live

Works by Dvořák et al

London Chamber Orchestra

Signum Classics SIGCD638



Recorded live for the LCO's centenary, these works for string orchestra are packed full of drama. The Vaughan Williams has the kind of nervous energy that only a live performance can bring. (FP) ★★★

Nordic Piano Sonatas Works by Grieg, Stenhammar and Sibelius
Fabiano Casanova (piano)

Da Vinci COO297

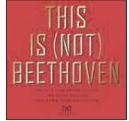


A superbly chosen programme – the little-known Stenhammar is an absolute delight – is played with gusto and character. A shame the recorded sound leaves a little to be desired. (JP) ★★★

This is (Not) Beethoven

Variations by Arash Safaian
Sebastian Knauer (piano) et al

Modern 5053860729

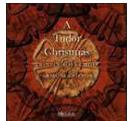


Rounding off Beethoven year are these compelling, inventive reworkings of some of the composer's most famous works. Harmonic twists and turns, plus some fine orchestrations, add to the enjoyment. (OC) ★★★★

A Tudor Christmas Works by

Byrd, Gibbons, Tallis et al
Trinity Boys Choir EIGHT, et al

Rondeau ROP8002



An octet of singers from the Trinity Boys Choir presents seasonal music from a bygone age. Necessarily staid, perhaps, but with a warm, intimate atmosphere nonetheless. (MB) ★★★

Versailles Works by Rameau, et al
Gábor Boldoczki (trumpet), et al
Sony Classical 19439728872



Arranging concertos written for the court of Louis XIV for trumpet may sound like an eccentric idea, but Boldoczki is a terrific, theatrical musician who injects these rarities with real spirit. (OC) ★★★

A Winter's Night

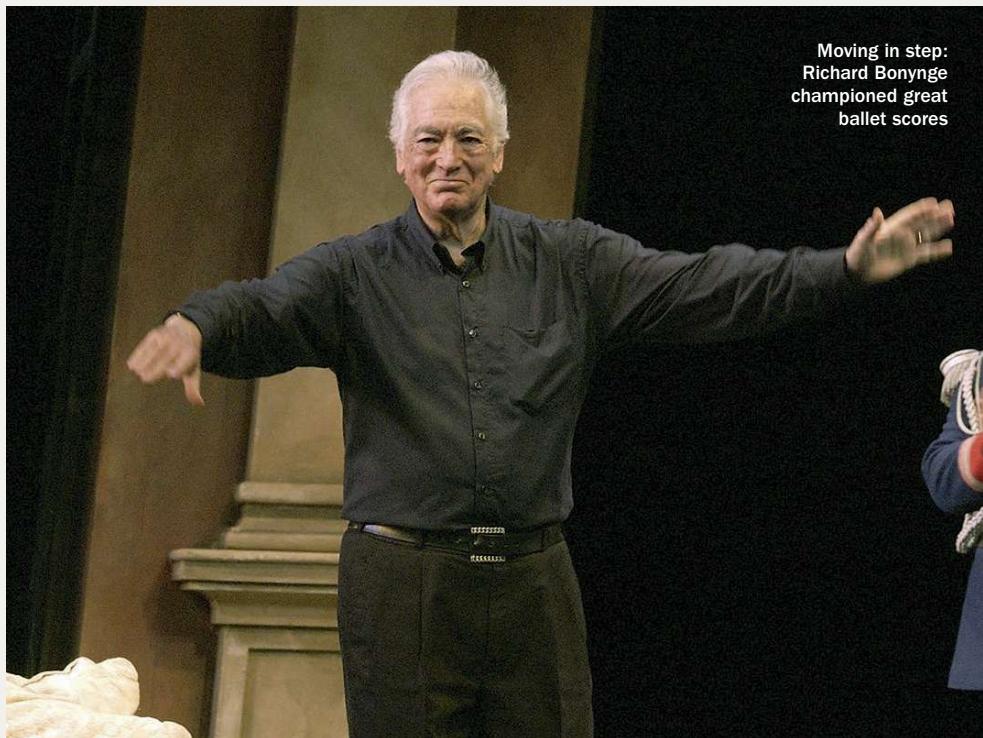
Works by McDowall, Holst et al
Winchester College Chapel Choir et al
Signum Classics SIGCD646



Despite a few issues with the blend of sound in the choir, the brass adds dynamism and vibrancy to this selection of carols old and new, making it a pleasantly festive listen. (FP) ★★★

*Reviewers: Michael Beek (MB),
Oliver Condy (OC), Freya Parr (FP),
Jeremy Pound (JP)*

The month in box-sets



Moving in step:
Richard Bonynge
championed great
ballet scores

Bonynge on ballet, and New Year's joy

Our round-up also includes Marian hymns and organ music by JS Bach

His name is legendary, and with **Richard Bonynge – The Complete Ballet Edition** (Decca 485 0781) fans of the conductor, and ballet, are in for a treat. A 45-disc collection, beautifully packaged and featuring original sleeve artwork, Decca has pulled out all the stops, creating a veritable encyclopaedia of ballet recordings. Full scores, recital albums and rarities are gathered, honouring Bonynge's passion for the artform. It's scheduled for release before Christmas, so add it to your gift list.

In time for the 80th anniversary of the Musikverein's annual knees-up, **New Year's Concert – The Complete Works – Extended Edition** (Sony Classical 19439764562) picks up where the label's 75th birthday release finished, sharing recordings from 1941–2020. The 26-disc collection features over 350 works performed by the Vienna Philharmonic under the batons of a glittering roster of 16 conductors, from the concert's founder Clemens Krauss to this year's guest star, Andris Nelsons. You might even get round to listening to it all in time for New Year 2022...



Decca has pulled out all the stops, creating an encyclopaedia of ballet

Those of you who fancy something a little more ancient may want to seek out **Ave Maria – Marian Hymns** (Brilliant Classics 96137). This ten-disc collection is abundant in riches; it's an almost forensic foray into centuries (and centuries) of music devoted to the Virgin Mary. The evolution of this particular musical devotion is apparent as the listener is guided from Gregorian Chant to the 20th century, via Josquin, Bach, Mozart, Pärt and everyone in between.

Digital recordings of ensembles including the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge make this a set to take note of.

But if you crave something of a Bach yuletide, then **JS Bach – Complete Organ Works** (Signum Classics, SIGCD640) probably ought to go in your stocking. The 16-disc set gathers together each of David Goode's recordings from this ambitious and rewarding project (for both performer and listener), recorded over the last five years on the Metzler organ in Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge. Bach's seasonal works are on CD 6, if you wish to start there, while the in-depth booklet essay is an added bonus.

Roger Thomas surveys a fascinating and endlessly varied collection of releases

JAZZ CHOICE

The thrill of the chase

A display of musical energy and grace from a brilliant goddess-inspired female supergroup



ARTEMIS

Artemis

Renee Rosnes (piano, MD), Melissa Aldana (tenor saxophone), Anat Cohen (clarinet), Ingrid Jensen (trumpet), Noriko Ueda (bass), Allison Miller (drums), Cécile McLorin Salvant (voice)

Blue Note 893738

Occasionally a band seems to spring from nowhere, mines its chosen traditions for new and exciting material and captivates its audience seemingly before the ink has had a chance to dry on the press release.

It's never entirely true, of course, but with its debut album this all-female septet (and culturally we still can't commit ourselves to whether that fact alone should or shouldn't amount to news) seems to do all of the above. The main untruth lies in the mixture of chance encounters, agreement on good ideas and the network of recommendations that actually brings such gatherings together in their own time; when it sounds as if the resulting band has been together for a decade, you know it works.

This set of animated new pieces moves through a wide range of inspired contemporary material with a rare combination of celebratory energy and grace. That said, we should expect this from any project directed by Renee Rosnes, whose far-sighted melodic sense provides the perfect thread uniting some very talented players. ★★★★

Christmas round-up

Months when the Jazz Choice slot is hard-fought are routine, but this particular instance also brings a degree of poignancy. There are new solo piano albums from both



Keith Jarrett and **Fred Hersch**, their marked difference being that the former is a further concert recording from Jarrett's 2016 European tour while the latter is an affectionate take on some popular songs, recorded in Hersch's home studio as a response to the recent/ongoing pandemic (delete as not applicable, but at the time of writing it's hard to be optimistic). It's facile to think of these recordings in before-and-after terms, but Jarrett's *Budapest Concert* (ECM 2700/01)

★★★★★, a double album majoring on expansive structures and lavish development recorded in front of a live audience, contrasts profoundly with Hersch's *Songs From Home* (Palmetto PM2197) ★★★★★, a gently reassuring offering during



stressful times. Being a Fred Hersch album, however, there's also plenty of sophisticated thinking present as well as just enough subtle assertiveness to remind us that respite isn't the same as defeat. The idea of home-as-musical-territory also applies to Jarrett's album, as it celebrates his ancestral roots with nods to Bartók stirred into a performance that the pianist has described as a personal best. Both of these releases are unreservedly recommended.

By contrast, it's hard to enthuse about *Remembering Jaco*, a well-intentioned project that sees the otherwise brilliant **Biréli Lagrène** switch from guitar to fretless bass



and team up with the thunderous **Multiquarium Big Band** to produce a set of arrangements of pieces associated with the legendary Jaco Pastorius. Regrettably,

Lagrène's bass technique is perfect to the point of slickness and fails to capture the idiosyncrasies that made his one-time bandleader's style unique, which in combination with the intrusive and unnecessary spoken interludes by Weather Report drum veteran Peter Erskine makes the whole undertaking rather unlikeable, despite its manifest sincerity. The arrangements themselves, at least, are robust and convincing. (Naive/Believe NJ7195) ★★★

It could be argued that the only useful definition of jazz is 'music that could be programmed into a jazz festival', a contention endorsed by the ever-expanding



jazz-by-default non-genre. **Lost Ships** certainly has one foot in the intimate chamber-jazz world, but is also a wider exploration of the songwriter's craft. Singer **Elina Duni** and guitarist **Rob Luft** add guests on piano, drums and flugelhorn to perform a mixture of original, traditional and near-standard songs with compelling results that would be evocative of Norma Winstone and friends were it not for the very different quality of Duni's voice: I'd plead for the description 'intimately operatic'. Quite remarkable. (ECM 2689) ★★★★

Another definition that sounds somewhat self-referential is what it means to be that thing called a 'jazz listener', a role which actually



requires more modes of attention than most other musical forms. Both the above album and **Abrazo**, from accordionist **Vincent Peirani** and soprano saxophonist **Emile Parisien**, require the kind of detailed focus that no civilian would associate with a jazz venue, yet the latter still eschews salon music niceties to inject a genuine jazz sensibility into everything from tangos to a Kate Bush cover. Ingenious and very appealing. (ACT 9631-2) ★★★★

||||| TAKE FIVE

An interview with today's finest jazz musicians



Big data:
composer-arranger
Maria Schneider

This month: Maria Schneider

Since forming a band in 1992, Maria Schneider has been recognised as one of jazz's finest composer-arrangers. She has clocked up 12 Grammy nominations and five awards for work in different genres, including with David Bowie. Last year her album *Concert in the Garden* was added to the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry and in 2020 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, among other honours.

The album *Data Lords* is a project she is especially passionate about. CD1 examines the impact of the digital world on our lives while CD2 evokes the real world, increasingly side-lined as we spend ever more time on our devices. I ask how she has transformed her complex views on these issues into music. 'I'm first and foremost looking for sounds that thrill me,' she says.

'Data Lords reflects my fight to hang on to my own sovereign interior landscape'

'If those sounds conjure up images or experiences, I love that moment of discovery and run with it, letting those associations drive development of the music. I had a few experimentation sessions with the band, looking for fresh sounds for new worlds I was trying to create. It helped me test new improvisational directions and to find subtle rhythmic and interpretational things to get a new feeling from my band.'

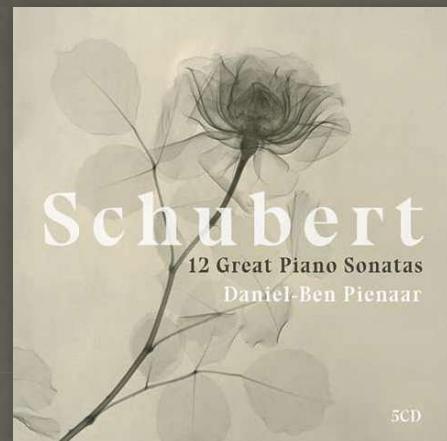
Working with Bowie influenced *Data Lords*. 'It re-opened my pleasure of working with a darker palette of sound. This album has a heavier use of guitar as well as electronics on a couple of trumpet solos, but generally the sounds come out of simply approaching the horns in a little different way.'

'Music can be such a healing force but you have to give yourself the space to let it come in. *Data Lords* reflects my fight to hang on to my own sovereign interior landscape, amidst the deluge of information and manipulation from big data companies. I wish people would realise the cost of the loss of small businesses that can't compete, the big companies' manipulation of thought and opinion, the confusion of truth. I'm only scratching the surface. We all need to think carefully about what kind of world we want.' **Barry Witherden**

NEW RELEASES

SCHUBERT: 12 GREAT PIANO SONATAS

Daniel-Ben Pienaar piano



5CD

AV 2425 5 CDS

Daniel-Ben Pienaar relishes in Franz Schubert's revelatory works – the composer's 11 finished sonatas and the seminal fragment D840 in C – their extraordinarily detailed possibilities of characterisation, their call for immense energy and abandon, and navigating the vast dreamscapes that unfold in the course of this six-hour musical journey.

ITALIAN POSTCARDS

WOLF – MOZART – BORENSTEIN – TCHAIKOVSKY *
QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

*with Ori Kam viola and Eckart Runge cello



AV 2436

Quartetto di Cremona celebrates its 20th anniversary with its first release on AVIE, featuring works by composers inspired by the Mediterranean landscape, including Mozart's "Lodi" Quartet, Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*, and Nimrod Borenstein's *Cielo d'Italia*, which was commissioned by the quartet especially for this release.

Books

Our critics cast their eyes over this month's selection of books on classical music

House of Music – Raising the Kanneh-Masons

Kadiatu Kanneh-Mason
OneWorld Publishing 978-1-786-07844-5
320pp (hb) £18.99

Popular culture has long been fascinated with talented families, but rarely more so than with the Kanneh-Masons, a family of seven children, all of whom are gifted musicians. Their mother Kadiatu has now written a memoir candidly

portraying what life is like with her loud, captivating musical family.

Kadiatu's stories of growing up in Sierra Leone and the early years of

motherhood are some of the book's most poignant. 'There is nothing rational about wanting children,' she writes, as we learn of her five miscarriages. After their eldest Isata is introduced to music as intellectual stimulation, the younger siblings soon follow suit. Kadiatu and husband Stuart's investment in their children's musical lives is indubitable, from Stuart ('never shy and always resiliently optimistic') sending the score of the then 10-year-old Isata's Piano Concerto out to a handful of orchestras to Kadiatu stepping in to teach the children when the family's finances were stretched.

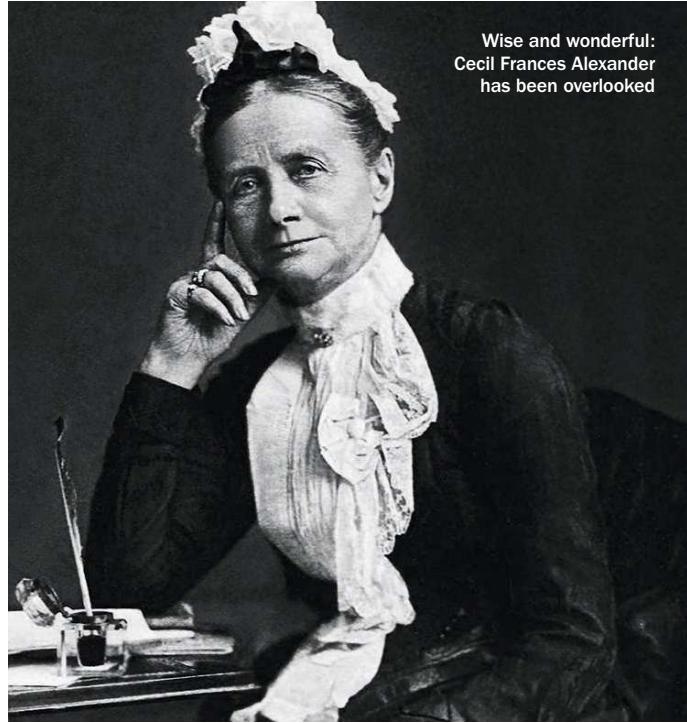
Despite the glamorous moments of her children playing at the Royal Wedding and on *Britain's Got Talent*, it's the unextraordinary parts of Kadiatu's story that stand out: the vital, powerful role music plays in their home. *Freya Parr* ★★★★

Immortal

Jessica Duchen
Unbound 978-1-789-65115-7
352pp (pb) £10.99

The identity of Beethoven's 'Immortal Beloved', the mysterious recipient of a love letter penned by the composer in 1812, has remained a source of intrigue ever since Beethoven's death. Music writer Jessica Duchen delves into this mystery afresh in her captivating new novel *Immortal*. Duchen hones

ALAMY



Wise and wonderful:
Cecil Frances Alexander
has been overlooked

in on the life of Countess Therese Brunsvik, one of Beethoven's pupils and still regarded by some

as a possible 'Immortal Beloved'. The novel follows another path, however, framing the story as a series of letters by the elderly Therese which gradually disclose an alternative narrative, nonetheless rich in secrets and heartache.

Set amid the turbulence of the Napoleonic wars and the glitter of Viennese high society, *Immortal* presents a grand sweep of early 19th-century European history, and the story is playfully peppered with familiar characters, from Constanze Mozart to violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Yet perhaps the most compelling aspect of the book is Duchen's redrawing of Beethoven not as an untouchably ferocious and enigmatic figure, but a fully-rounded human: vulnerable, playful and affectionate. Beautifully crafted and painstakingly researched,

Immortal offers a winning blend of historical rigour and free-wheeling imagination. *Kate Wakeling* ★★★★

Music and How It Works – The Complete Guide for Kids

Charlie Morland
Dorling Kindersley 978-0-241-41160-5
96pp (hb) £12.99

Dorling Kindersley already has a good line in music guides, but this new title written by British guitarist, songwriter and producer Charlie

Morland is aimed squarely at primary/elementary school-aged children. His experience in the industry gives him

more than a certain amount of credibility and what he manages to pack into a book of less than 100 pages is pretty amazing. Design-wise this is beautifully colourful and uses very clear iconography; Morland's writing never talks down and is accessible and totally clear. And he covers a lot of bases,

too; yes there's history, but there's also science – great sections on the very nature of what music is, how it works physically and how it can make us feel. These insights are broken up by sections on genres, but also really clear entries into music theory. Classical music has a strong presence, given its place in music history and continuing influence, but readers are introduced to everything from Hip-Hop to K Pop, too. A must for burgeoning musicians. *Michael Beek* ★★★★★

She Wrote The Songs

Patricia Hammond
Valley Press 978-1-908-85358-5
128pp (hb) £15.99

It's perhaps unwise for a music critic to admit this, but the first piece I ever learned was the *Chop Waltz* – aka *Chopsticks*. At the time,



I was also happily singing *Autumn Days* in school assemblies and *All Things Bright and Beautiful* in church. Until reading mezzo-soprano Patricia

Hammond's superb *She Wrote the Songs*, I hadn't really given this music much thought – it is eclipsed in my memory by the 'proper' pieces I studied for exams and recitals.

All three works were written by women composers: *Chopsticks* by Euphemia Amelia Nightingale Allen (under the pseudonym Arthur de Lulli), *All Things Bright and Beautiful* by Cecil Frances Alexander and *Autumn Days* by Estelle White. Hammond makes a strong case for this 'domestic' music, having sifted through the archives – including her own impressive collection of parlour sheet music – to tell the stories of this overlooked genre and its talented composers, among them Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, who collected Hebridean folk songs and Avril Coleridge-Taylor (daughter of Samuel). A supporting disc featuring 34 songs (and *Chopsticks*) performed by the writer and pianist Andrea Kmecova illuminates the well-researched text. *Claire Jackson* ★★★★

London Symphony Orchestra

Sir Simon Rattle

BEETHOVEN

Christ on the Mount of Olives

Elsa Dreisig
Pavol Breslik
David Soar

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Stone Records presents
Wagnerian soprano

Jenufa Gleich

with her solo debut CD

Träume

BBC NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF WALES

FABRICE BOLLON

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An evidently well-suited talent ...

Jenufa Gleich throws herself into the music with wild abandon which brings the whole thrillingly to life ...

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I cannot wait to hear Jenufa Gleich in complete Wagnerian recordings"

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Audio gift guide

Need some ideas of how to treat an audiophile this Christmas? Our resident audio expert *Chris Haslam* presents a gift guide for the 2020 festive season

THIS MONTH: CHRISTMAS GIFTS



ACTIVELY BRILLIANT SPEAKERS

Q Active 200 £1,449
(FS75 floor stands £349)

The first active speaker system from Q Acoustics looks like a game changer for anyone keen to enjoy hi-res streaming and audiophile sound quality without the need for a huge hi-fi.

Each powered speaker features two 2.25in drivers and a 4.5in rear-firing subwoofer that can be positioned virtually anywhere without impacting on the sound, while six Class D amplifiers offer 280W of total power.

Streaming wirelessly to the stereo speakers is the control hub (Wi-Fi/Bluetooth) which is compatible with most sources. Choose Spotify Connect, Roon, Apple Airplay 2, Alexa, Google, Qobuz and Tidal, or stream from your computer's hard drive; you can also connect TV audio via HDMI or optical input and there's also a phono preamp for a turntable. Most impressively, it converts whatever the file type is to 24-bit/96kHz hi-res audio. www.qacoustics.co.uk

INDULGENT HOME LISTENING

Philips Fidelio X3 £299

The perfect antidote to long chilly evenings stuck at home, the X3 is a luxuriously comfortable pair of wired open-backed leather-clad headphones designed for long listening sessions in the comfiest of chairs. They're stylish, despite the size, but importantly the 50mm neodymium drivers, once paired with the best resolution music source you can find, offer the sort of space and detail I'm used to hearing from far more expensive headphones. philips.co.uk



GREAT-VALUE TURNTABLE

Pro-Ject Audio Carbon EVO £449

Pro-Ject Audio has been making elegant and award-winning turntables since the early 1990s, and while the world was going CD crazy it stuck to its guns, creating models with fine sound without the audiophile price tag. OK, so £450 isn't loose change, but their latest belt-driven design is available in nine finishes, plays 33s, 45s and 78s, features an 8.6in carbon-fibre tonearm, heavy steel platter and gold-plated RCA outputs, and comes with the Ortofon 2M cartridge, itself worth £95. henleyaudio.co.uk





A QUALITY UPGRADE

Marantz PM6007 £499 and CD6007 £399

The Marantz PM6 has been winning awards for years, and while the latest upgrade looks remarkably similar to the last, small but important improvements mean this amplifier

and CD combination remains one of the finest hi-fis you'll find for the money. The two-channel integrated amp delivers 45 watts per channel (8ohm, 20Hz-20kHz) and boasts a new DAC and five analogue input options, while the CD Player can handle virtually all music file types including any from USB.
marantz.co.uk



Solid performance:
this Marantz hi-fi
is one of the best

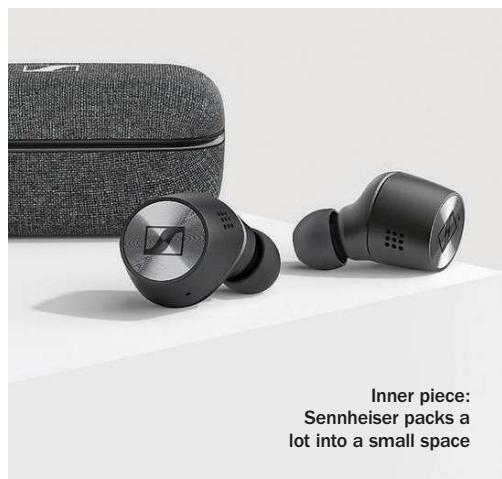


Personal soundtrack:
hear your TV without
disturbing others

PERSONAL TV SPEAKER

Sony Wireless Handy TV Speaker SRS-LSR200 £159

A minor miracle for anyone who struggles to hear the TV but hates the idea of simply cranking up the volume, this battery-powered speaker is your own personal soundbar. A slim dock connects to your TV (optical or 3.5mm ports) and transmits wirelessly to the speaker, allowing you to choose a comfortable volume without disrupting other viewers, or the neighbours. It has three speakers, one of which enhances dialogue, and you can even use the keypad as a remote control. sony.co.uk



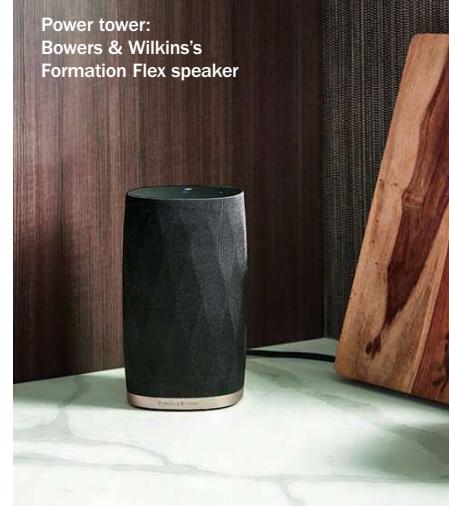
Inner piece:
Sennheiser packs a
lot into a small space

SUPERB SOUND ON THE GO

Sennheiser Momentum True Wireless 2 £279

I adored the original Momentum True Wireless, but was worried about yet another expensive incremental update. Sennheiser, however, has done a superb job, shrinking the earbuds without impacting on performance while squeezing in active noise cancellation. Battery life is seven hours (21 hours extra from the carry case), and the 7mm dynamic drivers work overtime to produce a composed, controlled performance with plenty of space to let individual instruments soar. sennheiser.com

Power tower:
Bowers & Wilkins's
Formation Flex speaker



Sounds of the future

Maybe it's the knock-on effect of COVID-19, the decimation of the live music scene and having all that extra time at home, but if the 24 per cent increase in subscription streaming services and a huge jump in hi-res recordings is anything to go by, we're starting to demand better quality audio products, not just convenience.

Our need to escape into a favourite recording will continue being a focus in 2021, and while cheap voice-control speakers are starting to sound better, I predict that music fans will gravitate towards traditional brands like Naim and Bowers & Wilkins, who are continually managing to marry audiophile quality with streaming convenience.

Despite the talk of modern convenience, however, vinyl sales were up a third for the first half of the year, suggesting we're taking more time over our listening. Thankfully, turntables look set to enjoy an equally hi-tech renaissance with improved streaming capabilities and competitive pricing to help engage a new generation of analogue devotees.

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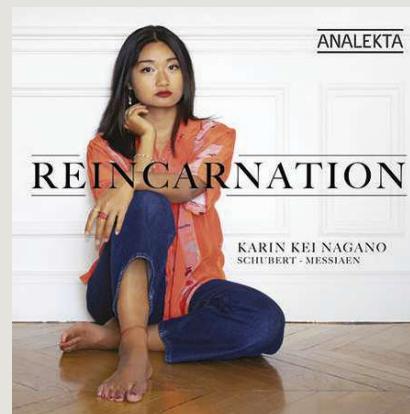
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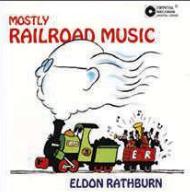
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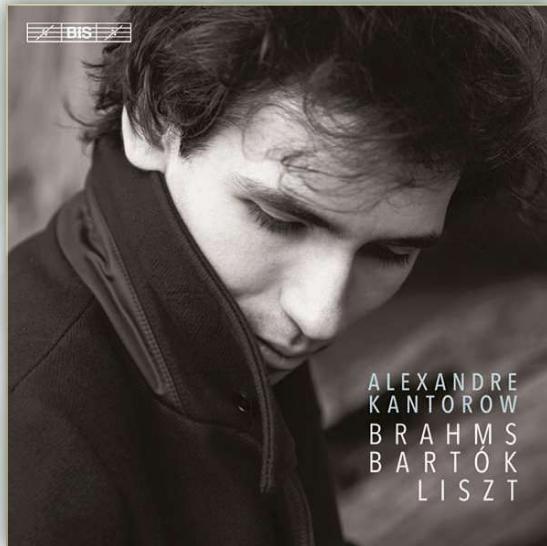
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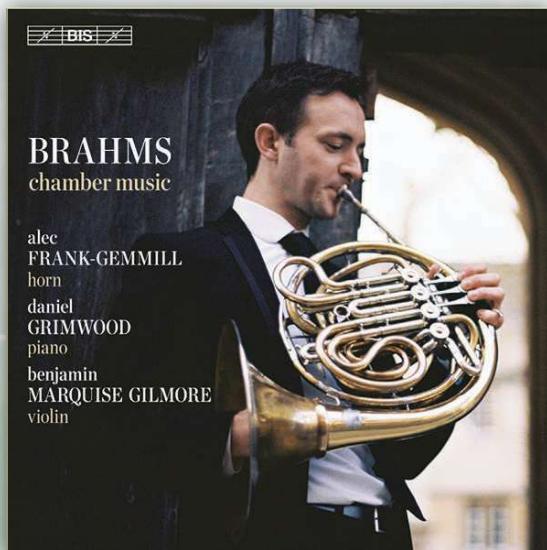
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TV&Radio

We pick out this year's Christmas highlights, from carol services to Hogmanay celebrations

St John's Advent Carol Service

The Advent Carol Service from the Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge is a bit of an annual treat, returning this year with a live broadcast conducted by director of music Andrew Nethsingha. As usual, the service will include a selection of readings, prayers and music to lead us up to Christmas.

Radio 3 Choral Evensong;
29 November, 3pm

A Choral Christmas

Bob Chilcott and John Rutter (see p17) ring in the festive season with the BBC Singers and BBC Concert Orchestra in a joyful celebration of choral music. The pair will conduct their own works, including Chilcott's *On Christmas Night* and Rutter's *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*, as well as other Christmas classics.

Radio 3 in Concert;
16 December, 7.30pm

Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'

For one of the final concerts of Beethoven's 250th anniversary year, tune in to hear the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and its founding conductor Daniel Barenboim perform the great composer's Ninth Symphony in Bonn, the city of his birth. Joining the orchestra will be a selected group of singers from the European Youth Choir.

Radio 3 in Concert; 17 Dec, 7pm

Breakfast Carol Competition

This year, Radio 3 asked amateur composers to set Paul Laurence Dunbar's hope-filled poem *Christmas Carol*. The shortlisted works will be presented across Radio 3 from 10 Dec, as selected by a panel including bass-baritone Bryn Terfel, organist Anna Lapwood and composer Ken Burton. After a public vote, the winner will be announced on 18 December.

Radio 3 Breakfast; 18 Dec, 9am

Christmas Around Europe

The European Broadcasting Union's musical journey across

THE 12 BEST FESTIVE PROGRAMMES



In the spotlight: soprano Golda Schultz performs at the Last Night of the Proms

the continent kicks off at 9am in London with the BBC Singers, before taking us through Copenhagen, Montreal, Reykjavík, Barcelona, Ljubljana, Cologne, Arnstadt and, finally, Munich. You can expect to hear traditional Icelandic folk songs, premieres of new works and festive favourites along the way.

Radio 3 EBU Day of Christmas Music; 20 Dec

Choral Evensong

Recorded at the Chapel of Royal Holloway, University of London, this service includes a series of festive Bible readings, as well as hymns and short pieces by Arvo Pärt and Paweł Łukaszewski, performed by the Choir of Royal Holloway. Stay until the end to hear the voluntary: Arvo Pärt's *Trivium*, played by organ scholar George Nicholls.

Radio 3 Choral Evensong;
23 Dec, 3.30pm

Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

The Christmas Eve service from King's College, Cambridge (see p32) began back in 1918. Based around nine Bible readings, the service has hymns and carols peppered throughout. It returns this year – albeit without a full congregation – for TV and radio broadcasts over the Christmas period, with choral music by Imogen Holst, Bob Chilcott and Elizabeth Poston.

BBC Four: 24 Dec, 3pm;
Radio 3: 25 Dec, 1pm

Handel's Messiah

If ever there's a piece that signals Christmas, it's Handel's *Messiah*. Get ready for the 'Hallelujah' chorus to raise your roof in this archive recording from the BBC Proms – details of which are yet to be announced.

Radio 3 in Concert;
24 Dec, 7.30pm

Royal Opera House Christmas Concert

Kate Molleson presents a festive gala concert from the Royal Opera House, featuring extracts from fairy-tale operas including Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as other seasonal works including Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. Roderick Williams, Jennifer Davis, Hanna Hipp and Jeremy White appear as soloists alongside the Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House in this festive celebration.

BBC Radio 3: Opera on 3;
26 Dec, 7.30pm

Christmas Walk

In recent years, we've joined writer Horatio Clare on various slow radio walks across Europe. In 2018 he retraced Bach's journey to Lübeck and last year he travelled across Germany to explore the concept of 'the wanderer'. He returns to the airwaves with another walk, this time celebrating the light and warmth of the winter months.

Radio 3 in Concert;
25 Dec and 26 Dec, 3pm

Night Tracks Hogmanay Mix

As soon as the clock strikes midnight and you've finished singing 'Auld Lang Syne', Radio 3's *Night Tracks* kicks off a Hogmanay celebration, with a music mix inspired by the traditional Scottish New Year's celebrations.

Radio 3: Night Tracks;
31 Dec, 12 midnight

Last Night of the Proms

Completing a two-week run of Proms repeats from this year's season, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conductor Dalia Stasevska (see p54) are joined by violinist Nicola Benedetti for Vaughan Williams's pensive *The Lark Ascending*, before soprano Golda Schultz enters for the usual Last Night festivities.

Radio 3: Proms 2020;
31 Dec, 10pm

CATHEDRALS, CHURCHES AND ABBEYS

AT CHRISTMAS

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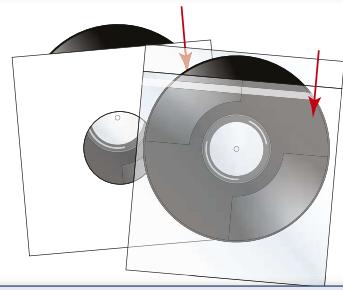


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THE QUIZ

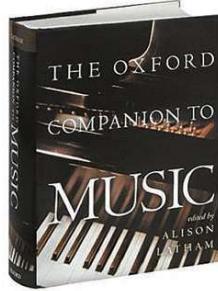
Wrap up warm and have a go at our wintery quiz...

1. 'Che gelida manina' ('Your tiny hand is frozen') is an aria from which 1896 opera?
2. Whose First Symphony, premiered in February 1868, bears the subtitle 'Winter Daydreams'?
3. Which composer's Symphony No. 11, subtitled 'The Year 1905', references the events of Bloody Sunday outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg in January 1905?
4. Whose piano pieces include a prelude called *Des pas sur la neige* ('Footsteps in the Snow') and, in his *Children's Corner*, a movement called 'The snow is dancing'?
5. Which composer is alleged – probably incorrectly – to have died from a chill when, returning home from the pub on a cold evening in November 1695, he found himself locked out by his wife?
6. 'Tibetan Winter' is the title of the second movement of *Four World Seasons* by the composer pictured above. Who is she?
7. Who composed the score for the 1947 film *Scott of the Antarctic*, later adapting the material for his *Sinfonia antartica*?
8. Inspired by a wintry scene at the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, which French composer penned *The Skaters' Waltz* in 1882?
9. The eminent musicologist Sir Donald Tovey famously described the final movement of which composer's Violin Concerto as 'a polonaise for polar bears'?
10. *Penguinski* is a short orchestral work composed in 1933 by which English composer?
See p13 for answers

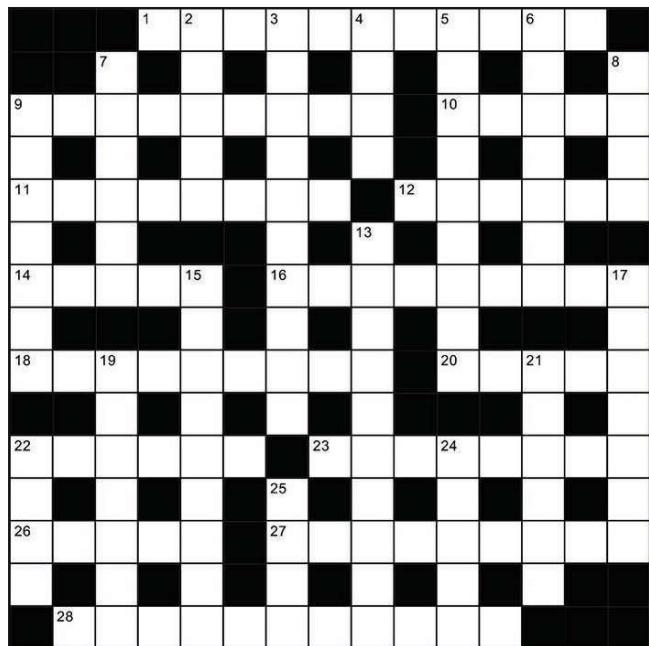
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ACROSS

- 1 5 24 by Tchaikovsky (11)
- 9 English composer joining family and child after a lot of risk (9)
- 10 Further performance a little maturer, unusually (5)
- 11 Man following choir in making percussive sound (8)
- 12 See 7 down
- 14 A couple of days with University piano? That's to make sense (3,2)
- 16 Home of great singers about to participate in song? Good (9)
- 18 Scottish composer, chap holding unusual claim to premiere in Leith (9)
- 20 Excellent manual for organ (5)
- 22 5 24 by Adams (2,4)
- 23 5 24 (for a while) by Puccini (2,6)
- 26 Welsh songwriter was rearranging a couple of numbers (5)
- 27 Resent most of dull broadcast in the final analysis (3,6)
- 28 Sly piano can upset West Indian composer? (11)

DOWN

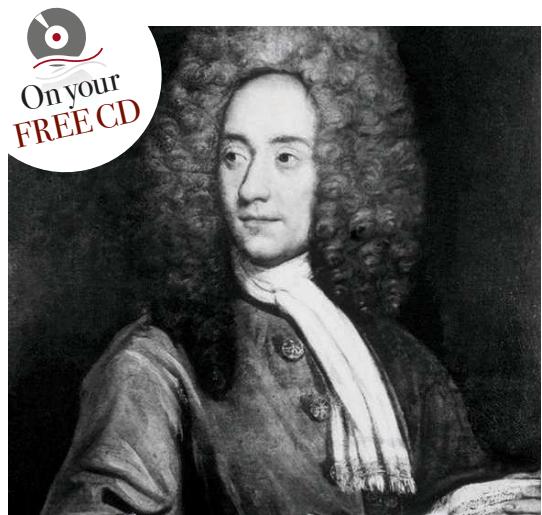
- 2 Jerk requiring German wine to grasp finale of *Rienzi* (5)
- 3 Various lyres not enveloping one in echoing style (10)
- 4 Some Balakirev in error for Australian composer (4)
- 5 What will represent its charms? Carols, for one (9)
- 6 Last of pack are hosting completely satisfactory sing-along (7)
- 7 5 24 by Herrmann (1,5,2,4)
- 8 A very prolific composer getting a negative vote from France (4)
- 9 Speak loudly, mic lead being broken (7)
- 13 Rock group performing on meridian (4,6)
- 15 Pathos in musical work elevated US soldier getting upset over French city (9)
- 17 Librettist's good, having modified 75 per cent of libretto (7)
- 19 Contralto confused three altos and two tenors about new choral work (7)
- 21 Remarkable vision, you feel, excited after end of concerto passes (6)
- 22 Wagner heroine interrupting *Titanel's aria* (4)
- 24 Europe rapidly offering home for stage work (5)
- 25 Opera heroine showing limits of bare stages (4)



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Jan-Dec 2019 – 27,394

Simon Russell Beale

Actor

Sir Simon Russell Beale is one of Britain's favourite actors, whether playing Lear, Hamlet or King Arthur in *Spamalot*. A former St Paul's Cathedral chorister, he has presented the BBC TV series *Sacred Music*, featuring The Sixteen and conductor Harry Christophers. He continues his collaboration The Sixteen in *A Choral Odyssey*, online until 31 January.

My father is a skilled amateur musician and we've always enjoyed musical games like 'name the composer'. He was working as an army doctor in Germany and when he picked me up from Gütersloh airport at the start of the school holidays, he slid a tape into the cassette player and said, 'Listen to the beginning of this'. It was **MAHLER**'s Eighth Symphony and, even on a little tape in the car, it was just monumental. I had never heard anything like it. I'd been trained as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral where I played oboe and piano, and my sight-reading was pretty good. After hearing the Mahler I rushed out and bought my first red Eulenburg mini-score so I could see what this massive work looked like on the page. It was the beginning of my addiction to following pieces with the score.

I was a music scholar at Clifton College and later a choral scholar at Cambridge. Reflecting that time, I've chosen a **BACH** motet, because his motets tend to be overshadowed by the bigger choral works even though they are wonderful to sing. I remember performing *Singet dem Herrn* in the university chamber choir run by Richard Marlow. He was a fierce taskmaster but those were the most exciting concerts I've ever done. I loved choral singing but I hated singing solo, although I followed other Cambridge choral scholars to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to study voice. I soon realised my mistake and auditioned



The choices

Mahler Symphony No. 8

Harper, Popp, Auger; Chicago Symphony Orchestra/Georg Solti Decca 475 7521

JS Bach Singet dem Herrn

The Sixteen/Harry Christophers Helios CDH55417

Soon it's gonna rain

Blossom Dearie Fontana TL 5454

Richard Strauss Oboe Concerto

Chamber Orchestra of Europe/Heinz Holliger (oboe/conductor) Philips 446 1052

Beautiful Thing

Mama Cass, The Mamas and the Papas, Altman Universal/Island MCD 60013

for Tony Church, head of the drama department, who took me on mid-year.

One of my university friends was Michael Law, who now runs the Piccadilly Dance Orchestra. He taught me about jazz and introduced me to the way that singers could change the nature of a piece just by the way they sing it. One that stuck in my head is **BLOSSOM DEARIE**'s version of

'Wonderful guy'. It's a very jolly song from *South Pacific* but she sings it so slowly, with such longing and sadness. We do this in my work, too; you take a Shakespeare play and although you don't deliberately try and do it differently, often you'll find there's a part that hasn't been looked at for a long time in that particular way.

I do love **RICHARD STRAUSS**'s Oboe Concerto even though I didn't enjoy playing the oboe as a child – the constant struggle with reeds! The organ scholar at Gonville and Caius introduced me to Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, and I just thought 'Wow'! I became fascinated by Strauss and the strange and controversial life he led. You can hear such regret in the music, an awful sense that he was witnessing civilisation destroying itself.

Around the early 1990s, in the thick of the Aids crisis, I saw *Beautiful Thing*, a play by Jonathan Harvey about a very happy, successful gay relationship. I remember walking out and being so buoyed up by it. One of the characters loved Mama Cass, and the sunny sound of **THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS** formed the soundtrack. I bought the CD in the foyer and played it over and over again: songs like 'Make your own kind of music' and 'It can only get better' suggested hope, and we really needed it then, just like we do today.

I still play the piano whenever I can; I've just acquired my first instrument because at last I have room. A few years ago I started taking lessons from pianist Lucy Parham, who is now a good friend. When we first met I said, 'I just want to be able to play a piece all through without stopping, and without swearing!' I played in one of her Christmas concerts at Kings Place, London, when each pupil took a movement from Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. I learnt mine off by heart and played it without stopping or swearing. It was much more terrifying than playing Hamlet, and I was proud of myself for doing it. 

Interview by Amanda Holloway

Oslo
Philharmonic

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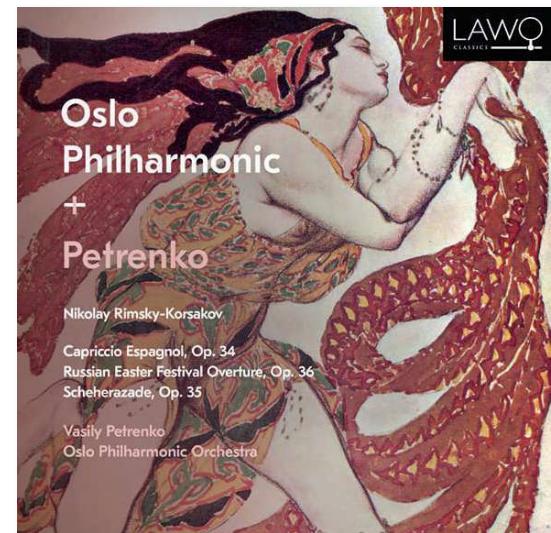
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PROKOFIEV / MYASKOVSKY

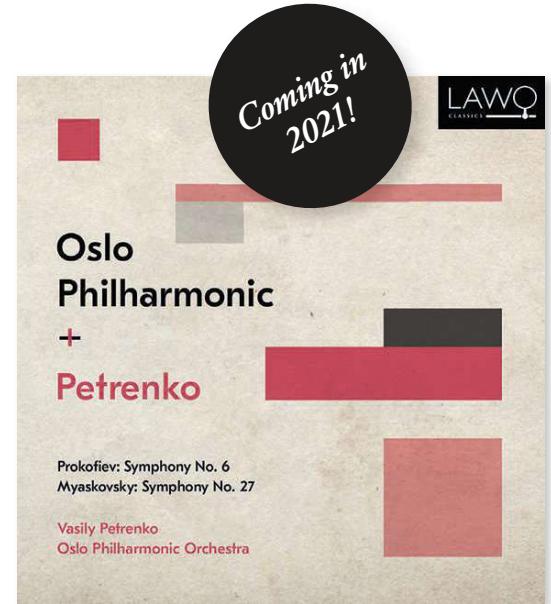
PROKOFIEV: SYMPHONY NO. 5

MYASKOVSKY: SYMPHONY NO. 21

Vasily Petrenko
Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra



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